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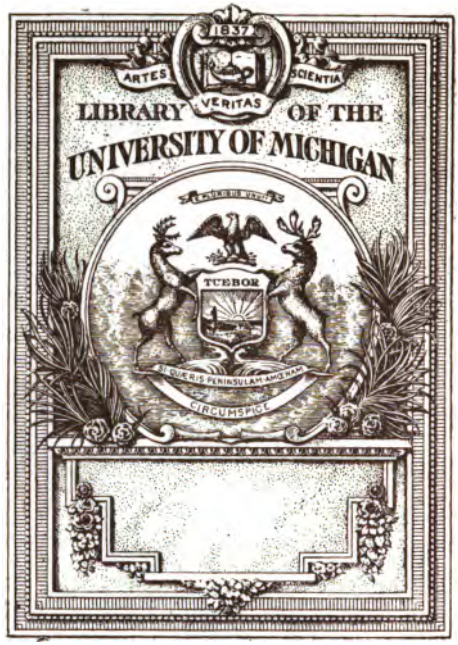
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ATOMS OF EMPIRE

C. J. CUTCLIFFE HYNE

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ATOMS OF EMPIRE

BY

C. J. CUTCLIFFE HYNE

Author of

"Adventures of Captain Kettle," "Mc Todd," "Thompson's Progress," etc., etc.

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I

THE BAIT

"WHAT on earth does the Chief have an animal like this Padgett to dine in Government House for?" asked Dayton-Philipps, querulously. "I expected to rough it, of course, when I came out here to the Coast, because they promised us active service, but hang me if ever I expected to rough it at the Governor's dinner-table with a missionary-thing like that. Why, the fellow hadn't got an aitch to his name; he stoked with his knife all the time; and when he got a fresh stock of perspiration on his forehead — O my aunt! he was too awful for anything."

Forbes, the Colonial Secretary, fanned himself in his long-sleeved Madeira chair, and suggested lazily that Dayton-Philipps had been taken out of lavender too soon, and sent out into the warm, wide world too early. "We're a primitive people, we Coasters," said Forbes. "If a man has a white skin and a dress coat, we ask him to dinner. You're too fastidious."

"Rot!" said Dayton-Philipps. "And, besides, the Padgett person hadn't a dress coat."

"Oh, of course, I was speaking figuratively.

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Being a padre of sorts — I forget what his fancy religion is called: never heard of it before — being a padre, he naturally wears his official cloth. I saw you didn't like him at dinner. But you were very good; you swallowed down what you wanted to say; in fact, you behaved quite nicely."

"I never wanted to kick a man so much in my life. He insulted you; he said your department was corrupt. He insulted the Governor; said practically that he was a disgrace to West Africa. And he insulted the other two men skilfully and rudely. As you all sat tight and tried to look as if you liked it, when it came to my turn I just followed your lead."

"He called you a hired butcher of innocents, didn't he?" asked the Colonial Secretary, with sly malice.

"It was worse than that. Never mind, though — I only got my ordinary share. But what amazes me is, why did we stand it? Of course I couldn't buck after all you big men had given me a lead; but what I couldn't understand was, why should the Chief swallow it down, when one good square snub would have shut the bounder up permanently, and let the rest of us do the talking."

"His Excellency the Governor," said Forbes, "has to play to the gallery. Uneasy lies the head that wears a — well, a Governor's helmet. Especially a West African Governor's. If a man wants to make any sort of a mark here, and bag — say — a K.C.M.G., he's got to put on steam and

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hurry, or else the climate will step in and bag him first. My faith, though, some fellows have luck! Here's his present Excellency not been back from England a fortnight, and this chance comes slick in his way."

"Let's see," said Dayton-Philipps, "you were Acting Governor, weren't you, whilst he was away at home on leave?"

"I was," said Forbes, "and knew exactly what was needed, but never had a ghost of an opportunity of getting it through. It wasn't from want of enterprise, either. I'm as keen on doing my duty to the Empire — and earning my corresponding step in the Service — as any of my neighbours. Then the Governor comes back, bucked-up and rosy from home, and the thing might have been pre-arranged, it's so handy for him. It's nine to one it comes off, and then he'll get the credit. I've slipped back into my old berth as Colonial Secretary, and all that will come in my way will be a lot of extra work and a lot of exposure, by which I shall certainly scoop a good many extra doses of fever, and it is not improbable that — as I can't be spared for home-leave now — I shall peg out here in harness."

"Oh, rot! you'll not earn a funeral this time."

"Well, I hope not. But anyway, it's a sure thing I don't get any of the plum. There's one and undivided, and it goes to the head of the Colony for the time being, in the ordinary course of routine. Have another whisky-and-soda?"

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"Not for me," said Dayton-Philipps. "Man wants a very clear head if he's to follow what you C.O. fellows mean when you're pleased to be enigmatical. In fact, I'm hanged if I can make out what you've been driving at since we've been sitting here."

Now there is no doubt that the Colonial Secretary was very naturally annoyed at the course of recent events. The commercial fate of the colony had been for two or three years hanging in the balance. To the trained mind, which could see beneath the surface, it was easy to grasp the fact that the missing cog had arrived, which would, if properly used, set the machinery of state triumphantly advancing again. And Forbes told himself, bitterly enough, that had he been Acting Governor, he would have been quite as competent to order things for the Colony's weal as the present man who had returned fresh and healthy from his home-leave. It was the chance of a lifetime; and on the West Coast, where chances are few and life is short, a man cannot be blamed for a little acidity of mind when these fortunate opportunities pass him by. But at the same time State policy is not a story to be bawled abroad in a moment of spleen to any subordinate official who may not understand its niceties, and the Colonial Secretary, with a sudden recollection of these facts, pulled up his confidences.

"I didn't suppose you would follow all that's

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going on in the Chief's office just now," he said. "Young men who are seconded from home regiments, and come out here to take up commands in the Hausa police, do not understand much about high politics."

Dayton-Philipps laughed.

"That's right," he said; "take me down a peg. I'm sure I don't mind. I never did have any hankering after the diplomatic service. My own trade's good enough for me. But I don't mind telling you straight that I want to rise in that. I didn't come out to the West Coast just for my health. Look here, I don't want you to talk out of school, but if you can give me a straight tip, I'd be very grateful for it."

"I couldn't say anything definite," said Forbes, warily; "but you'll do yourself no harm if you get to know your men thoroughly, and hammer up their efficiency, and carry out well any little orders you may get, and, in fact, keep up to the mark generally. If you're slack, you'll just rank in with the ruck; if you're not, you may see your chance close ahead of you one of these fine days."

"H'm! I suppose that's active service you mean?"

The Colonial Secretary evaded an answer.

"By Jove!" he said; "it's grown almost cool enough to turn in with the hopes of getting a bit of sleep. Let's see: you said you wouldn't have another whisky-and-soda, didn't you?"

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"You're beginning to think the talk has got on dangerous ground, eh? All right, — I'll clear out. I've heard my 'rickshaw boys shuffling about down below there for this last half-hour, and if I keep them waiting much longer, they'll probably upset me on the road home, by way of a lesson. Good-night, old man."

Dayton-Philipps thought a good deal that night as the 'rickshaw boys ran with him down to the police barrack, whilst the quiet heat lightning blinked at him from overhead; but still he failed to see the reason for His Excellency the Governor's civility to the obnoxious Padgett. He was a young officer newly come out from home, and he had only been in Africa long enough to shuck off the notions he had acquired about the engineering of a West Coast Colony in the Island of his birth; and so far had gathered very little knowledge of the real article which was used on the spot.

However, at a dinner-table before which he found himself a couple of nights later, he got a deeper insight into the question, and heard Imperial policy discussed with a freedom which, a month ago, he would have set down as blasphemous. His host was head of a big Coast trading concern; the other diners were all commercial men; and, unlike the Colonial officials, they were able to say openly what they thought, with never a care as to whether their sentiments leaked over into print. Especially were they bitter against

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a certain section of the English community who are very highly looked up to by many of their neighbours here at home.

"I wish," said Charteris, "that we could get some of those canting, whining fools out here for a bit to see for themselves the mischief they are doing. But no fear of that: they've nothing to gain by knowing the truth, and meanwhile they're making a living out of their silly theories. What's worse, good old mutton-headed England believes them. West Africa is a poisonous swamp that isn't worth sticking to; the white man is still the palm-oil ruffian of fifty years ago; the black man is a little angel, only kept from being drowned in gin by their pious efforts; the sole reason the country isn't chucked away to France, or Germany, or any one else who wants it, is because it's such a fine hunting-ground for the blessed missionary. Oh, it makes me sick and ashamed to be a Britisher when I see the way those solemn noodles handicap the fellows out here who must know the Coast best, and who would make fine prosperous colonies if they weren't perpetually clogged."

Baines, the man next him, tenderly filled his glass.

"Tommy," he said, "wet your whistle, and don't waste your wind. It's no use telling all this stale history to us, because we know it already; and it's no good going home and shouting it out there, because people would only look

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superior and not believe you if you did. Moreover, there's a silver lining to every cloud, and ours looks as if it's just going to show through."

"What are you driving at now?"

"If you don't know, I shan't say. But I got a hint out at Government House to-day, and I dare say other people in this room know a thing or two as well. For instance, I bet a trifle Dayton-Philipps has put his virgin sword on the grindstone already in the anticipation."

"Well, yes," said that officer; "but I'm hanged if I know who it's for. Not the French, is it? We aren't going to have a European war, are we? I thought things were simmering down."

"French be blowed!" said Baines.

Charteris winked from across the table knowingly.

"What's wrong with cutting up the King of Katti?"

"That's the chap that owns the hinterland to this colony, isn't he?" asked Dayton-Philipps, the new comer.

"Same savage. All our trade comes through his country to the Coast here, and if we don't collar it, the French will."

"If the French take it, they stick on tariffs and choke you out, don't they?"

"If the French come in at the back there, we may as well put up the shutters at once, like they did in the Gambia. The trade of this colony would be dead for good and always."

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"Then why the plague don't we take it?" asked Dayton-Philipps, petulantly. He had come out to the Coast to see active service; he had acquired two stiff doses of fever already; and so far he had been employed on nothing more warlike than barrack duty and routine. He was getting very disgusted with the change. The commercial men round the table understood all this as well as he did, but being older Coasters, they understood also the forces of distant ignorance which cramped them in, and as they had cursed and explained these same forces ten thousand times already amongst themselves, they forbore out of sheer weariness of the subject to speak of them again.

However, when Dayton-Philipps repeated his question, Baines did vouchsafe some sort of a reply. "We don't take Katti City," said Baines, "because we aren't let. We've deputationed, and memorialised, and petitioned, till we're sick of it; we get called a pack of gin-selling buccaneers for our pains; and that murdering old beast, the King of Katti, is buttered up as a high-minded native lord. My aunt, I wish they could see his private crucifixion-tree! I wish they could even be taken close enough to smell it."

Dayton-Philipps remembered that Baines was the only white man who had ever been in Katti City — or, to be more accurate, the only white man who had ever emerged from that capital —

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and hoped to hear more details of that place. "Yes?" he said.

"Latterly the old cock's closed the roads; he's put *ju-ju* on rubber, ivory, and palm oil; which means all our trade's stopped; and when we post him a letter to expostulate, he sacrifices the messenger on somebody's grave. Thanks to our clogs at home, we've got no prestige here, and he doesn't funk us in the very least, and he's showing his bally independence and highmindedness and lordliness just now by depopulating the country right and left. The only way to put things straight is to send up a big expedition; but the red tape guided by the black coat at home won't hear of that. After badgering at them for the Lord knows how long, the Governor got permission to send (I'll trouble you) an unarmed expedition to ask would the King kindly say he was sorry, and be a good boy for the future. Did you ever hear of such fatheadedness?"

"I never heard of an expedition going."

"Not likely. His Excellency here may be a bit of an old woman about some things, but he does know something about the ways of the up-country nigger, and the King of Katti in particular. I can tell you there was a fine boil-up in Government House here over the suggestion. He wrote home that he took upon himself to countermand the order. He said he wasn't going to send a batch of his young men to be deliberately murdered in the Katti fetish grove as a sop to

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any one, not even to get an excuse for starting a very desirable war of annexation."

"Well," said Dayton-Philipps, "I can't say, from what I've heard of the gentleman, that I should care to go and pay a polite call on the King of Katti with nothing but a walking-stick and a card-case myself." And there for the time being the topic dropped.

But Dayton-Philipps, not being altogether a fool, was beginning to have inklings of what was fluttering the Colony just then, and next evening at the Governor's dinner-table he saw the matter even more clearly. The function was a solemn one. Officially it was described as the leave-taking of the Rev. Alfred Padgett, but the esoteric significance of the gathering was patent to everybody. With one exception, all the diners, from the Governor downwards, were in a queer twitter of excitement. The only really calm man there was Padgett himself, and as it was plain that everybody present listened to even the least of his words with open fascination, he took advantage of his opportunity.

He did not mince matters in the very least; he did not try and ingratiate himself with anybody; but he took each diner in turn, from Forbes, the Colonial Secretary, to Charteris and Baines, mere traders and members of Council, and insulted each over his particular share of the Colony's work, with deliberation and system. He was a man with a good clear voice, and none

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of his words miscarried; and when he selected a victim, all the other men at the table listened with respectful attention. The Colony, for the future, it seemed, was to be run on entirely different lines: trade and the glorification of the Empire were to be things of the past; and in the meantime he was going up to call in person on the King of Katti to present him with a new creed and, apparently, a bale of second-hand trousers.

The men round the table, old Coasters all of them, with the one exception of Philipps, solemnly and emphatically warned him of the dangers which lay beyond the narrow fringe of the Colony; and, as offensively as might be, he rejected all their advice. Nobody resented the contradiction; nobody showed up the silliness of his shallow, ignorant, sledge-hammer arguments. That was a great night for the Rev. Alfred Padgett, and he mopped at his wet face and made the most of it. When the hour came to go — and he sat consumedly long — they were all still waiting and watching, and each man came forward in his turn and shook hands with him, in a manner that made the parting scene almost like a religious rite.

But at last he went away out of the hot glare of the room into the warm night outside, and the men got into long chairs and took deep breaths as if a big restraint was taken from them.

For long enough there was silence. Each had

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his own thoughts to add up and value, and the lazy punkah eddied the tobacco smoke overhead.

Then Baines said: "By God, he is brave enough. When I told him what Katti City was really like, he never turned a hair. I watched the beggar."

"Pah! Brave?" said Forbes. "It was only mutton-headed ignorance. Simply, he didn't believe you."

"Think so?" said Baines. "Perhaps you're right. He certainly doesn't take any of us much at our own valuation here. Well, he'll find out many things for himself in due time, and after that the wires 'll begin to work, and the nice pink English Tommies will begin to come, and the West African squadron —— Good Lord! that gives me jumps."

His Excellency the Governor had accidentally tipped over a tall soda-water tumbler, which fell with a crash on to the floor. The men in the room, with their nerves all on springs, started as if a shell had burst under the table, and by the time they had settled down again, frowning and fanning, the Governor had finished apologising for his clumsiness, and had started a talk on the new pier which it was proposed to erect to supersede the dangerous surf-boats. His Excellency might not be a brainy man, but even his enemies could not help admitting his infinite tactfulness. He did all his most delicate business round a dinner-table, and yet he was never known

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to let a dinner conversation grow dangerous. There have not been many public servants of whom this could be written on their official tombstones.

If Padgett expected a final ovation the next morning before he set off into the bush, he was disappointed. He started soon after daybreak. It is in the cool of daybreak that the West African white man begins his work. But on this occasion every one seemed most unnaturally to have overslept himself.

Mr. Padgett stepped out in full panoply of pith helmet, white clothes, and umbrella, with a fine caravan of carriers before and behind; but no one of a higher species than laughing, chattering natives filled the street between the factories and the grass-roofed dwelling-houses. Not a single member of the white population had come to see him off, which, taking into consideration the occasion and the place, was an obvious personal slight. But Mr. Padgett did not mind that. On the contrary, he rather preferred it. He was one of those men who make a luxury of the minor martyrdoms.

The ease with which he collected his caravan of carriers, seemed to him a proof that the solemn warnings which the whites of the Colony had given him about the dangers of the Katti country were merely a pack of lies, intended to keep him from finding out how matters really lay. It did not occur to him that when the white man leads,

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the West Coast native, being a childlike and somewhat brainless creature, will always follow and carry — for pay. And so, cheered by his bigoted ignorance, he strutted complacently enough through the trim streets of the Coast town (which made up his sole personal acquaintance with Africa) and disappeared down a narrow eighteen-inch road which corkscrewed its way into the bush beyond.

There are no electric telegraphs up-country in Africa, but in some mysterious manner news floats about amongst the natives of what is going on, and its transmission is astonishingly rapid. Comment on the progress of Padgett's expedition drifted into the factories from almost every one of its halting-places, and the white men of the Colony's capital conned over the scraps they heard with tingling nerves. In the temperate climate of England it is hard work to sit entirely still whilst one is waiting for an almost certain catastrophe, but in the unhealthy stew of a West Coast town, where one's health is chronically in rags, the suspense of such a vigil can very well approach nearly to the unendurable. But the machinery of Government and business cannot stop because its drivers are oppressed by megrims such as these, and the white men in the white clothes, with their faces yellowed by liver and violent suns, plied on doggedly at their tasks as heretofore. Latins, or men of the more emotional nations, would have halted listlessly during that

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wait; and as a consequence they and their kind do not now make empires. The Anglo-Saxon is a different type of animal. He may have less emotions, but nothing short of his own funeral makes him neglect his appointed work for very long together.

As a visible result, they were rather apt during this time of suspense to brace up their dinner champagne with angostura bitters, and to get hold of a few more than the customary cocktails between whiles; but they kept themselves well in hand, and, in fact, rather took on a guardedness of speech that was foreign to them. There was a hysterical native press in the Colony's capital, which at times got quoted in the London papers; and it would not do to let the idea leak out into print that they foresaw the good the forthcoming catastrophe would do, before that catastrophe took place.

At last, however, the thundercloud broke, and the tired white men breathed deep and prepared for the deluge. The King of Katti was no niggling savage. Reports came down from his gory capital thick and fast. He had sent an armed force to meet the invader, whose carriers promptly fled — and small blame to them! The wretched Padgett first tried to run, and then, as explanations were beyond him, pluckily started to fight. Accounts of the skirmish varied, as native accounts will: some tales credited him with terrific slaughter; whilst others held that he had merely

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laid about him with a walking-cane; but all agreed upon his capture and subsequent execution. Indeed the King of Katti, to remove all doubt, sent down a week later a shrivelled hand and arm, purporting to be Padgett's, as a sign of his contempt for the white man's power, and as a hint to deter future callers.

But by this time the home cable had got the news well in hand, and the sweating operators were working double shifts, whilst men in twenty offices over half the world arranged for the bringing together and the furnishing of an army. And a little later the English papers flashed out one morning, black with indignation and headlines, and asked how long a feeble English Government was going to permit missionaries of the sacred English race to be foully murdered by African barbarians. There was no talk now of the high-minded native lord; there was no talk of offending French or German susceptibilities. The good people at home had not been stewing over the catastrophe for a month before it happened, and the reasons for it all they would not have understood even if these had been explained to them. The news to London and England was as fresh as it was horrible, and the clamour for vengeance dinned from every side. From the slaying of this one white missionary, Britain instantly knew that the hinterland to this Colony was not fit to govern itself, and it shouted forth the order to annex without further thought.

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The project — as Coasters wearily knew — was not a novel one, but hitherto it had been kept in the background by a sturdy opposition. Now, however, the opposition vanished. Even wooden-headed Little Englanders and their adherents know when to be silent sometimes.

The British public says in its commanding way, "Do this!" and is accustomed to see it done. It chooses its servants well, and they are always smart to carry out the details. Forbes, Dayton-Philipps, His Excellency the Governor, and the other men on the spot, with the eye of prophecy had secured a month's start, and naturally had got a wealth of preparations mapped out up the sleeve. When these were reeled forth in rhythmical precision, they spoke volumes (to the public) of the excellence of the Colony's organisation; and the hurrying war-correspondent, catching this key-note before he sailed, saw the perfection of the local machinery from the moment a surf-boat ejected him on the beach, and patted the white men of the place on the back in lavish dispatches. Clearly this Colony had been too long neglected. Clearly the men now in charge were just the fellows to bring it with a rush to the front.

At the London War Office, officers were tumbling over one another in their eagerness to volunteer; at Malta, Cape Town, Woolwich, Gibraltar, pieces of the war machine were getting oiled and started; a wire to Suez sent a

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home-coming Indian regiment to stew some more in the tropics before it could swill its English beer; and in Free Town harbour, Sierra Leone, Her Majesty's penny steamer *Alecto* took on a hurried lick of paint as she prepared for her four-hundredth campaign. Nobody knew how strong were the forces of the King of Katti, and nobody, except a few responsible heads, very vastly cared. Dayton-Philipps prayed piously that they wouldn't "swamp the show with regiments."

"The old Lord High Executioner up at Katti," said he to Forbes, "has got some good fighting soldiers with excellent guns, so my fellows say, and it will be a beastly shame if they are scared into running away before the fun begins."

"Well, we want the man beaten once and for always," said the Colonial Secretary, who looked more to effect than method. "We've more luck than I hoped for: the Colony isn't having to pay for the troops; we've been such good boys that we're having 'em stood for a treat; and they can send the whole bally army for anything I care."

"And make a silly picnic of it? I didn't come out here for picnics; I came for promotion; and if it's all Tommies and no fighting, that means I've to stay where I am. Look here, you let me waltz in with the Hausas — call it a reconnaissance in force, if you like — and I'll clean out Katti's town for you before the other fellows

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arrive. I say, I could really. Do try and work it with the Chief, there's a good fellow."

"Rot!" said Forbes. "This war isn't going to be run for your particular benefit, my young friend — or mine, for that matter. It's for the Colony. It 'll bring the Colony into notice, and let everybody know what a fine place it is, and how well it's run — by us, of course — and how much more valuable it's got by having the new territory added, and, in fact, what a desirable Colony it is for younger sons and capitalists in every way."

"Oh, if you look upon the war as a beastly advertisement scheme!"

"I do. This is the way it runs: 'To let, New portion of the British Empire, offering a highly desirable dumping-ground for single young men desirous of making a pile. Apply early for allotments.' And when the guns begin to shoot, everybody at home will turn round and see that advertisement written big in the newspapers and on the hoardings. The more guns there are, and the more they shoot, the more those excellent people will turn round to look, and become aware of the Colony's existence."

"How mad that poor beggar Padgett would be," said Philipps, "if he could only know what his blundering expedition had led up to! If he had been a German, he could not have hated any more the idea that this Colony should expand or any way go forward."

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The Colonial Secretary turned on him with sudden asperity.

"Now look here," he said, "mind how you talk about Padgett. There are a lot of reporters on the beach here now, and if they get to know too much, the fat 'll be in the fire with a vengeance. Reporters are all very well in their way; they're fellows we've wanted out here badly for long enough. But it is only intended they should know the proper things. All the white men in this Colony are safe enough as far as intention goes, because they know, whoever they are, that if the Colony pushes ahead, they move on also. But the man that scares me is your loose-lipped man."

Dayton-Philipps flushed.

"I am not altogether a dam' fool," he said. "The whole business mystified me at first, I'll own. You were all so infernally close about it. But I began to see that the Chief wouldn't have a bounder like that to come and insult him day after day at Government House without a considerable reason, and after I sat down to think the matter out, I wasn't very long in seeing how Padgett would be of use. You see, I'm a bit of a fisherman myself, and when you can't rise 'em with a fly, live bait's usually the best thing, if you're fishing for the pot. But you needn't necessarily think I was the kind of fathead to go and bawl out the whole yarn to one of those correspondent fellows when he came into barracks for a cocktail.

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I'm not long enough out from home myself to forget how they look at things there."

"All right," said Forbes; "I didn't mean to draw you like that, only I thought a hint might be useful. Well, I must go down to the office again. My faith, though, this kind of tea-party does mean a mountain of work for the men on the spot. I wish I could think there was a chance of it bringing in something in the way of reward besides."

Now, it is no place here to reprint what the war-correspondents with the Expeditionary Force wrote of with such breadth of colour and detail. The converging troops, with their paraphernalia of guns, rockets, commissariat, ambulance, and all the rest, steamed out to the Colony from a dozen points, in war-ship and hired transport. Every dwelling in the town was a barrack, and Government House was an officers' free restaurant. The men on the spot who knew the country, suddenly changed from exiles into residents, and Dayton-Philipps, with little thrills of glee, found himself giving advice to an admiral, three colonels, and a general, who had already won high place in the traffic of war.

"Sharp fellow, that young what's-his-name — Philipps," said the big men amongst themselves. "Must try and shove him into something a bit better when this affair's through. He hasn't done much, of course, but he hasn't muddled everything, like these black regiment fellows generally do."

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And in due time the nice pink English Tommies (which Baines had sighed for) were dumped on the noisy beach by the surf-boats, and the march up country, with its attendant miseries, and road-making, and fever, was carried out according to honoured precedent and rule. His Excellency the Governor accompanied the force, not necessarily to be shot at, but merely as a guarantee of good faith; and Dayton-Philipps and his Hausas headed the advance, and ambushed the ambushing Katti men very cannily amongst the by-paths of the bush. The correspondents who accompanied the column painted the horrors of Katti City in fresh bright red, as though they were a thing which had never been heard of before, and quite ignored the fact that the Colonials had been vainly crying against them for years.

One illustrator, more ingenious than his fellows, sent home a sombre photograph of "Rev. Padgett's grave." But, truth to tell, Padgett had rather dropped out of history by this time. He was dead; he had been useful; and he was forgotten. What more could the man expect? In life he had not endeared himself to the Colonials.

There was no hitch anywhere. Great Britain makes a speciality of these little wars, and in them trains the sections of her fighting machinery perfectly, as some one will find out expensively when the threatened big war arrives. The King of Katti was duly caught, tried, and deported to a distant shore; his ecclesiastical arrangements

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were upset for good, and human sacrifices finally abolished; and in his place was set up one Dayton-Philipps, an ordinary British subaltern, as Resident, with a guard of Hausas, to uphold his dignity. The country, wearied of its old rulers, settled down at once, and the Hausas (who, being natives, are good judges of such a matter) showed their appreciation of the quietude by sending for their wives and families to come and take up immediate residence in Katti City.

Charteris and Baines bought over the Government loot of carved ivory and gold dust at such a nice profit to themselves that they were able a year later to "chuck the Coast for good" and live decently at home on ample incomes; and His Excellency the Governor received the reward of his tact and luck in the shape of the coveted K.C.M.G., and promotion to another colony where the death-rate for Europeans did not average more than twenty-seven per thousand, which of course was by comparison quite a health resort. Even Forbes got the reward which he so persistently refused to expect, and is now His Excellency the Governor, in his late Excellency's place. And at home people studied their maps and remarked complacently that territory eager for trade had been added to the British Empire, in acreage equal to the British Islands, with Belgium and Holland thrown in.

But Padgett was the discontented man, and in my humble judgment rightly so. He had

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acted on his own pig-headed initiative certainly; but all the same he had been made use of — as a Bait — neither more nor less. It appeared that he had not been killed at all, and the shrivelled hand which had been sent down as a mark of *bona fides* had been borrowed from some unknown stranger. Pleasantries of this sort are quite admitted in the diplomacy of the African interior. Instead, he had been haled off up country in the custody of a couple of local ecclesiastics, who (as probably he would have done himself) treated their prisoner with some intolerance, and did not liberate him till long after the trouble was over, and he had ceased to have value as a hostage.

He got down to the Coast in rags, but quite unchastened in spirit. Men certainly knew him, but after the first formal congratulations on his escape, their recognitions were disgustingly dry and inhospitable. One would have thought that their sense of generosity would have been touched; they all of them certainly had gained much through Mr. Padgett's unconscious aid. But I am only writing history here, and the fact remains that they gave him the cold shoulder. The man's usefulness was gone; they saw in him only a noisy, objectionable bounder.

Mr. Padgett went home as an "assisted passenger" by an early steamer, vowing vengeance on Colonial officials, the Coast, and every piece of work to which a white man can put his hand

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in West Africa. He would have a general inquiry; he would frame a list of abuses; he would have questions in Parliament; he would procure a Royal Commission. He might have done it, too, had the journalistic season been propitious, being a man of astonishing energy against his dislikes. But there was another excitement on hand, and the Colony was saved from worry. One small evening paper, after much clamouring at editorial doors, did publish an expurgated "Statement by Rev. Paget," but there the matter rested. The statement was not copied by any of the other journals. The other excitement on hand beat it in interest.

There is luck in these minor matters of cantankering, just as there is in the larger affairs of empire-making. Suitable baits do not come to hand every day of the week.

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II

RUN DOWN

"HULLO! there's Calvert, of all people!" I heard a brisk voice say behind me. "Now, he's the very man. I'll introduce you to him this minute, and then we'll go below and see your room, and backsheesh the steward into civility."

I turned my head and saw Vanrennan elbowing his way amongst the crowd which swarmed on the steamer's bridge-deck between the gangway and the head of the first-class companion. He had a couple of dressing-bags in his fists, a bundle of rugs under his arm, and a pair of ladies in his train. To these last he introduced me:—

"Mrs. Codrington, and my sister Mabel. They're going across to New York to stay with some friends, and then, when the warm weather comes, they're off with a party to see the Yosemite Valley. They'll be met on the wharf at the other side, but up to there they'll be two lone, lorn females, and I want you to give them the benefit of your countenance, and do the genial watch-dog business. By the way, you're taking matters pretty coolly: you look either as

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if you had been settled here for a week, or else had no connection with the steamer whatever. I suppose you are crossing by her?"

I laughed. "Oh, yes," I said; "I came on board her sixteen minutes ago; saw the Purser, and found I knew him; made him give me the best room in the ship instead of the one I'd got; carted my things in there one-time, and locked the door; and then cleared out here, and didn't worry any more."

"You're an old, bold hand," said Vanrennan, "and many years of wandering have made you perfect in the art of looking after yourself. What do you think of the boat?"

"Oh, she's a fine steamer, and she'll do a quick passage. Moreover, because she is a foreigner, they'll feed us extremely well, which is a great thing for this time of year."

"Then do you think we shall have a very bad crossing?" Mrs. Codrington asked anxiously.

"We may have a breeze, or we mayn't; the Western Ocean is always delightfully uncertain about that. But I was thinking about the cold. There'll be precious little going out on deck; meals will be the most interesting item of the day; and therefore a good table is a distinct pleasure to look forward to."

"Do you think there is any danger?" said Mrs. Codrington.

I smiled. "Remarkably little. Considerably less, for instance, than you would be exposed to

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if you travelled by train for a week backwards and forwards between London and Glasgow. In fact, if you care to give me the sum of one penny apiece, I'll insure you each for £1000 against fatal accident all the way across, like the weekly papers do ashore. Come, now, will you let me do that stroke of business?"

"Save your coppers," said Vanrennan, laughing. "Calvert is too grasping. Come along down below and get settled in your quarters, and then bid me an affectionate good-bye. I shall have to clear if I don't want to be taken on. Ta-ta, Calvert, old chap. So awfully good of you to take these damsels under your charge. Hope you'll all have a good time on the other side, and not get frozen on the road. Good-bye."

We hove up at dusk that afternoon, and because the Channel outside was white with an ugly, choppy sea, there were fiddles on the table at dinner and extraordinarily few diners. I sent down dry champagne and biscuits to Mrs. Codrington's room, and then, seating myself next to the Purser, made a gorgeous meal.

"We do ourselves well here in the grub line, don't we?" said the Purser. "Better than the English boats. We're dragging all the passenger trade away from them now. Come along down to my room for your coffee, and we'll have a quiet smoke before I get to work squaring up my papers. Lord! I wouldn't care to be the Old Man to-night! He'll be perched there freezing

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on the upper bridge till we're bang clear of the Channel, and very likely for the next twenty-four hours after that if the weather's at all thick. He's got just over a thousand human lives on this ship, and I guess they give him all the responsibility he's any use for. Steward, bring me down a bottle of liqueur cognac to my room. Now, Mr. Calvert, if you're ready."

The Purser and I talked Western Ocean shop during the burning of two Cuban cigars, and then he turned to at work, and I slipped off to the smoke-room and read the illustrated papers. It was eleven o'clock before the smoke-room steward hinted that the hour of closing had come.

I went out into the night, a black misty night full of rain and spindrift driving down from the nor'-nor'-west. I cocked my eye and saw the skipper and two mates patrolling the upper bridge; on the break of the deck ahead of me were three men in glistening oilskins; in the crow's-nest forward were two others; and I shivered luxuriously, and thanked the fates that I was a mere passenger who could travel in absolute safety and have no watch to keep. And then I went below, made fast my portmanteaux, and turned in. Sleep humoured me at once.

I woke to the tune of colliding ships and the full orchestra of Death.

To say that my senses came to me without flurry and at once would be too great a claim. By some violent shock from beneath I was

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banged up against the iron roof of the cabin. I pitched back on the floor, and for a minute or so lay there stunned.

Something serious was going on. I became dully conscious of this, and with an effort roused myself and stared curiously at the curtain-rod of the bunk, which lay doubled up and twisted between my hands. Then it began to be borne in upon me that the ship was awake with screaming and the trampling of frightened feet, and then the interpretation of these things came to me in a flash. We were in collision.

A man snatched open my door, stammered out, "We're going down: oh! what shall I do?" and ran away shouting. The ship was full of noise and darkness and hammering. The propeller had stopped; no light came when I turned the electric switch; and we had so heavy a list to starboard (my side) that already the ports were covered most of the time. It was precisely clear that the steamer was in a bad way, and one's first and most natural instinct was to bolt for the upper decks.

I'm ashamed to say that I had already rushed outside the door with this idea before I got my wits in hand again. But then I pulled myself up, and went back and dragged on some heavy serge clothes over my pyjamas, and added boots and a whisky-flask; after which I pounded off along the alley-ways to the room which Mrs. Codrington shared with the Vanrennan girl.

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The door of it was slamming noisily with the roll of the ship. I looked inside. The place was empty, and from out of the darkness came a swirl of water which ran coldly about my knees. I guessed they had gone to the upper deck, and ran there myself with the best of pace. There was a feel about the steamer that I knew. She lay down sodden and numb in the sea, and rose to the waves no more. I had felt that sluggish sullen roll before on another ship. We had found her drifting, and boarded her in mid-ocean, and had just time to leave her decks before she sank down to the ocean floor. The mail steamer was going to repeat that dive — and she was carrying a thousand human lives.

The bridge-deck lay atilt like the roof of a house, and it was carpeted with humanity. From the upper bridge, rockets climbed up high into the night in one never-ending stream of yellow flame. Orders, prayers, shrieks, and threats were being hurled about in every tongue that Europe knows. The stoke-hold crews, mad with fear, were raging like devils unchained round the grips and chocks of the lifeboats. Naked emigrants were with them. Sick men, who could hardly crawl, tore at the boat-awnings with their teeth. The ship's officers and the few deck-hands were swept aside like straws.

Then a bellow from the steam siren drowned all the clamour, and at that instant the moon slid out and burnt like a great white arc-lamp through

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a gap in the racing clouds. A shout could not be heard above that din, and the shouts died away whilst the trembling fingers fumbled on at boat-grips, and rived at the stops on the falls. Then the captain on the upper bridge let go the lanyard of the siren, and gave his orders before the silence could be broken.

"Keep your heads, and all will be saved," he cried in German. "Women stand by the starboard boats, and men away to port. Boat crews to their stations. I will shoot the first swine that disobeys me." Then he repeated the words in English and French and Norsk, till his cry was lost once more in the raging clamour.

Now, for myself, I had seen the uselessness of thinking about my own hide till matters were somewhat further advanced, and I remembered (with grim amusement) how I had offered to heavily insure two ladies' lives for the trifling premium of two copper coins. So from the moment of coming out on deck I had been employed in hunting for these charges amongst the mob, and had not been sparing vigour in the process. There were nine hundred people wedged into one group, and it was not a possible thing to go through these singly. So I had gone round outside the bulwark rail, occasionally climbing up by a stanchion or a stay, and had gazed down on the huddle of faces from above; and when I found the two that were wanted I fought my way to them with elbow or shut fist as required. Mrs.

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Codrington wore a flannel dressing-gown; and as the other girl had turned out in a singularly becoming garment of cotton, I gave her my own pilot-jacket, and stole also for her (by brute force) a spotted carriage-rug from a Polish Jew.

"Now," I said, "there's string in the pocket of that jacket, and this thing will make you an elegant skirt. You'd much better stop being frightened, and then we can get along more comfortably. You aren't going to get drowned, or anything like it. I've insured you for a thousand apiece to Vanrennan, and I can't afford to let you come to grief at that price. When these fools have stopped struggling and squealing, you shall go off in a big boat and join another steamer. We shall have ten round us in half an hour. Look at those rockets."

Mrs. Codrington gripped my arm. "Then you think we have a chance of ——" she began, and "B'm-m-m-m" said the great steam horn from above.

When we could hear ourselves speak again, and whilst the captain was giving his orders from the upper bridge, the Purser came to my elbow.

"Here, Calvert," he said in my ear, "you're a man. Those port boats won't lower anyway: she's listed too much over. I don't know whether we can get the starboard boats in the water without swamping with this sea running, but we've got to try; and if any one goes off in them except

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the boat crews, it's got to be the women and kids. Same old yarn, y' know. So you've got to peg out anyway, and you may as well do it in a way that'll make you respect yourself. Ah, would you?" He knocked down a frantic German who was battling his way towards one of the starboard boats with a revolver outstretched. He wrenched away the weapon, and gave it me. "Here's a gun, old man. Just you wire in and murder the swine if they try to swamp you. They'll soon see those port boats won't lower, and they'll be back here in a minute."

Now a peculiar feeling had come over me. I had made up my mind that I had got to die, and didn't waste time by being sorry for myself over it. All my brain was turned on two objects. First, I had got to keep my ticket clean by seeing that the two girls I was looking after were sent away clear of the mess. And second, I wanted to leave a very red mark on the cowards who were wasting other people's lives because they could not save their own. That last wish amounted to a mania. I was ashamed of being a man whilst some of those brutes lived and could call themselves men also.

One of the starboard boats had been lowered already, packed with people. But before she was in the water the after fall had jammed in the block, and because the other took charge, she tilted bow-downwards, and spilt her wretched freight into the charging seas. Another boat was

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swung out, and lay beating against the rail as the steamer rolled. I would have hustled my two charges into her, but she was crowded in an instant and lowered away. She took the water safely, shoved off, and with oars straddling out on either side, crawled away over the inky water like some uncouth insect.

Then came the rush. The list had grown till the port boats hung inboard against their davits, and the waiting crowds beside them saw that that road of escape was cut off for good. In half the tongues of Pentecost they screamed into the windy night that the ship was sinking, sinking — and each brute amongst them thought that his own life was worth more than all the honour and the wealth the world combined. They poured down the slope of the decks in a raving horde — Polish and Russian Jews, Hungarian peasants fleeing from the conscription, Italian thieves, Belgian stokers — a foul gush from the dregs of Europe; and with them came men who ought to have known better, but who had gone mad also, smitten by this same infection of terror.

I had slung the two women on to the floor grating of No. 3 lifeboat, and stood with my back against the gunwale. One of the mates, a gigantic Swede, rose up beside me, his teeth gritting with fury and a belaying pin gripped in his hand.

Three deck-hands were sweating and swearing

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at the falls, getting the boat lifted right off her chocks and swung outboard.

The other women on the decks were knocked down and stamped on, and the mob of men leaped at the boat. It was no time for words. The mate and I hit out at every face we could reach with savage fury, but none turned to hit again. They scrabbled at the boat's gunwales with their hands, and those behind tore the leaders back. I could have beat in their faces in my hate; but — I could not bring myself to shoot: there was nothing there worthy of a bullet.

The boat was lifted from its bed, and swung outboard. The steamer had ceased to roll, and the seas were coming green on her bridge-deck rail. The boat was floated almost before the falls were let go, and a wave came up and swayed her clear. The crowd shrieked and drew back up the slanting decks.

I leaned up against a davit, my breath returning to me in laboured pants. But the Swedish mate left me, and if ever murder showed in a man's eye, I saw it gleaming from his then; and shrieks coming through the darkness told what his fury was doing. He at any rate, I told myself, would die warm.

But the lust for maiming had left me. The last of the boats had gone, and the women and children who were left had got to die with us men, and with those who were infinitely less than men. The rockets were still spouting up in un-

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wearied series from the upper bridge, and once I saw the Purser pass me, jaunty as of yore, with a lit cigar in his fingers, and an assurance between his teeth that all would be well. But I heeded him little. The chill of Death was nipping me with its agues, and the hopeless minutes were dragging out intolerably. With a lifebelt I might . . . but no: there were women left, and I had got to stay.

Then of a sudden there burst out a roar, and a clang of iron, and a gush of scalding steam; and the decks ripped and splintered, and the steam rushed down in grey, peeling clouds. No, not that death. I vaulted the rail, and sank.

The instinct of the swimmer is curious. I had gone over the side quite satisfied that escape was hopeless, and intending to drown with one long plunge. But no sooner did the icy water thunder in my ears than the old instinct made me strike out for the surface. But I could not reach it. I swam on for what seemed to be minutes, hours, years, thousands of years; my arms aching, the veins like to burst through my skin; and then it came upon me that the steamer had sunk, and I was being dragged in her swirl down, down, down, to the dark sea floor; down, down, where it was too cold — down — down.

* * * * *

I opened my eyes and blinked; blinked again, and saw dimly the rough sea living-room of fishers. It was wainscoted with bunks round to the rudder

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case, and on the forward bulkhead was a fireplace resplendent with brass. I imagined I was in one of the bunks, but was not very certain about it, and so coughed inquiringly. Somebody came to my side. I pondered awhile, and then remarked, "I seem, somehow, to know that coat."

"It's yours," said the some one. "Don't you remember? I'm Mabel Vanrennan."

This was more satisfactory. I woke further, and inquired, "Where's the other — Mrs. — er — I forget?"

"Codrington," said a voice from one of the bunks. "Here."

I was getting on. "I'm afraid you must have lost all your clothes?" was the next thing that occurred to me.

"Yes," said the voice, "and such a lovely diamond star!"

Then came a torrent of sobbing, and, between sobs: "Oh! how could I be so horrid as to think of such a thing now? There are only sixty picked up, they say. And all those other poor people lost! Isn't it awful to think about?"

"Very probably," I said. "But we've saved our own skins, and I don't think we've anything to be ashamed of. It wasn't my fault that some one gathered me up, though."

Then a man came in and stared at me thoughtfully — a fisherman, in clumsy sea boots and brown-patched oilskin.

"Closish squeak you've had, mister," said he,

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slowly. "We just passed that other boat what run you down. She'd about seven foot of her bow gone, and looked pretty sick, I tell you. We hailed her to know if she wanted anything; but she said 'No.' Got her steering gear fixed up again, and was going to put into Portsmouth. She's a Welsh collier bound there. Rum go this has been. Where was your steamer hit?"

"Haven't a notion."

"Well, what were her water-tight bulkheads doing?"

"Very sorry, but I can't tell you."

"H'm!" said the man. "Then what do you know about it?"

"Nothing," said I, "except that I'm here now, and that just now I imagined I was drowned."

"Well," said the man, "you won't do much towards dirtying any poor beast of a sailor's ticket at the inquiry, that's one blessing. I'll send you in a can of tea, and then you'd better sleep. We're standing in for Penzance to bring the news, because there ought to be a reward kicking about, and by the time you wake we should be there. So long!"

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III

THE FINGER OF HANKIN

I

He was called William Edward Hankin Seale, and by giving him the name of Hankin, his godfathers and godmothers considered that they had provided him with brilliant prospects. Wherefore they economised, and forbore to add the usual christening mug and silver feeding tackle. In after years William Edward Seale had it constantly repeated to him that there was a man called Hankin who lived on a place called the West Coast of Africa, where he had amassed wealth, and was still amassing.

In his school days William Edward Seale said little about the vague Hankin. He learned that West Africa was a considerable distance from Charterhouse in miles; that the climate was hot, through some connection which it had with a thing called the equator, upon which the sun apparently traversed as a bead does upon a wire; and that the Coast produced gold dust, ivory, and monkeys. Afterwards he got hold of *The Cruise of the Midge*, and added to this list of products, slaves, fever, sunstroke, and picturesque fighting.

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He pictured Hankin as a king of countless negroes, who owned a long black schooner for nefarious purposes, and who went out for rides on his own private elephant and ate cocoa-nuts free of cost. He rather envied the old gentleman, but he did not swagger about him then. Later, however, he did both.

He went from Charterhouse to a bank in London, where he laboured easily, but acquired no unwieldy prosperity. He lived slightly beyond his income, but kept the leeway in check by waving Hankin before the eyes of his duns. He pointed out that the West Coast was notoriously unhealthy and that Hankin could not live much longer. He was generous in the matter of interest, too. He said that when he put on a black tie for Hankin, they would see that there was nothing mean about him when he came to pay for accommodation. So he lived on; and the rumours of Hankin provided him gratis with dances and theatre paper; and dinners and Sunday river-parties were bestowed upon him by people who had marriageable daughters. "It's no use your asking me to pay for anything," he would say cheerfully. "I've barely a sixpence beyond my salary — at present."

Occasionally he came across some man who had been in the Colonial Service or in a trading house on the West Coast, and asked about his connection, who, he stated, was some sort of a nineteenth cousin. But none of the Coasters ever

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knew about Hankin, or (what is perhaps more accurate) they never said they knew. So as far as William Edward Seale was concerned, Hankin remained vague and nebulous; but Seale never lost faith in his riches and dutiful cousinly affection (as bespoken by the afore-mentioned god-parents); and calculated on the approaching windfall with certainty and sweet delight.

It was the coming of Captain Charteris with Nancy that gave him his first definite idea of Hankin. Charteris wired from Liverpool to ask for an interview, and was invited to come up and dine at the club and talk matters over there. Charteris came, and enjoyed his meal, as most men do after a course of Coast and steamer fare; but he talked whilst he was eating, and what he said did woful damage to Seale's appetite. Afterwards they went to a quiet corner of the billiard-room for coffee and cognac; and between whiffs of a good cigar, Charteris went on with his tale:—

"We aren't mighty particular out there as a general rule, y' know, but that was a bit too blackguardly and low for anything. They kicked him out of the Service, of course; and they told him that if he didn't clear out of the Colony one-time, they'd prosecute him to boot, and he'd get sent home to do five years for an absolute cert. So he cleared; and went to Lagos."

"But he was very rich at that time, wasn't he?" Seale asked.

"Rich? He owned the finest assortment of

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debts of any man in Accra. They had to pay his steamer-fare to get him away. I don't believe the old scamp ever did have a cent beyond his pay, but he'd a knack of hinting that he was a millionaire, and people sometimes believed him. He blarneyed himself into a trading house in Lagos on the strength of swaggering about money, which of course he hadn't got, and he might have worked himself back into a comfortable position if he had only chosen to keep straight. But that was not his way. He hung on there for a couple of years till he'd got his fingers well into the pie, and then one fine day he pulled out all the plums that were available and skipped by the British African boat to Grand Canary. He'd about a thousand pounds all told in his pocket when he landed at Las Palmas, and on the strength of it he married that pretty little woman I was telling you about, who died when Nancy was born."

"After which he took the child back to the Coast again, and brought her up like a savage?"

"No, he didn't; and that's about the only good point I ever heard the old ruffian accused of. He left her in Grand Canary, farmed her out (don't you call it?) in a village just outside Las Palmas, and went back again to the Coast to find money for the up-keep of her. It was a pretty plucky thing to do, because several gaols were waiting for him anxiously, and he'd dirtied his ticket so thoroughly up and down, that no white man would touch him with the end of a swizzle-stick.

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What he did was to steam down coast to Lagos Roads, change over to the branch-boat and get across the bar, and then slip away from her by native canoe. He didn't land on the island at all. He went off over the lagoon, and then on, right up to the back of the Egba country. There was a hot war on then with the Yorubas, and it was about nine to one got knocked on the head and chopped; but somehow the old scamp slipped through, and then he started in to collect rubber. He got a mud-and-grass hut built and lived on native chop, and must have had a pretty tough time of it at first, because all the roads were blocked, and he could neither get 'trade' up-country or send his rubber down. But after a bit, things went better with him. He got his rubber carried down to Lagos, contrived to lay hold of a few domestic slaves to do his work, and was able to send remittances to the woman who farmed Nancy outside Las Palmas. If he'd stuck to what he'd made then, he might have lived pretty comfortably, because trade-gin makes tolerable cocktails when you're used to it, and up in that part of the bush you can always get chickens and mutton if you care to pay. But he didn't do that: he stuck to the cheap native chop; and when he had fever he grudged himself pills and quinine: it took him all he knew to scrape up eighty pounds a year for Nancy."

"Oh, my hat!" said Seale; "and I thought that man was a millionaire."

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"I wish," said Charteris, "you could have seen him when I did. I was up at the back of the Egba country with a Commission, and we picked up the wood-smoke of his cooking one day in the dusk. We had missed the village we were trying for, and had no fancy for collecting fever by squatting out in the bush. So we pushed on, and came upon a few chimbeques in a clearing. A thing that called itself a white man was in one of them, and that was Hankin. He was down with black-water fever, and when the doctor had done a turn with him, I went in to stand my watch. He wasn't an inviting spectacle, and if you knew what black-water fever is — which you don't — you'd understand why. But he was a white man, or had been white once, and out there one feels a sort of kinship to one's colour. So I sat by the poor devil and heard his yarn; and when he asked me a bit of a favour, I couldn't very well refuse it, because, you see, he asked when he was in the very act of pegging out. He wanted me to pick up this youngster of his as I was going home, and hand her over to you."

"But why to me of all people?"

"Hankin said," replied the other, stolidly, "that he knew you thought you'd some claim on him, and that therefore he considered he'd a claim on you. I said I didn't see the force of his argument. He said that was his palaver, and would I do what I was asked, or have a very nasty

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taste left on my conscience by refusing? So of course I was forced to say 'Yes,'-and there was an end of the matter. The Hausas buried him at sunrise, and we marched on."

"But what on earth am I to do with the brat? I'm making a poor enough show of keeping myself. I had — er — expectations once, but they haven't come off yet, and I'm more largely dipped than I care to think about. I'm only a poor brute of a bank clerk with half-nothing a year by way of pay. It strikes me you've done somebody a pretty mean turn."

"How could I help myself?" said Charteris, with a shrug. "I didn't know you from Adam, and Hankin shoved the job on to me at a peculiar time. You haven't seen a man die the way he did, in a bush hut, with no one round but savages, or else you'd understand. I can quite imagine it's an unpleasant surprise to you; but you know — you needn't take over the youngster."

"What?" said Seale, quickly, "you'll keep her on yourself?"

Captain Charteris laughed harshly. "I shall drag out my own leave here in England mostly on tick, and then get back to the Coast again. Man, I haven't thirty pounds in the world. I couldn't afford to be saddled with a dog. I suppose it comes to this: we shall both repudiate her."

"And the result will be?"

"Workhouse, I suppose."

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"What a ghastly thing to think about!"

"My dear sir, we can gather comfort from knowing it's no fault of ours. It's a case of 'sins of the fathers.' Hankin shouldn't have been a blackguard; or if he was, he shouldn't have married; or if he did marry, he shouldn't have allowed Nancy to step out into the world. If he's any sense of decency left, Hankin ought to be squirming in Hell this minute at the thought of the mischief he's brought about."

Seale hit the table in front of him so that the cigar ashes jumped.

"This is a horrible business anyway," he said, "but it's got to be put an end to. The more we think over it, the worse it gets. You and I have no legal responsibility; so we'll just hand over this calamitous brat to the police, and shuffle clear of the whole matter. Where have you stowed her?"

"At the 'Metropole.' We'll go there one-time if you like."

"Yes," said Seale, and strode noisily out of the room.

II

They exchanged only one remark on the way across.

"She's a taking little beggar," said Charteris, "though I don't think she cares much for me." Upon which Seale broke out against him with

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sudden violence and profanity, and insisted on the subject being dropped. And after that they marched down Northumberland Avenue in silence.

"It's right up at the top," said Charteris, as they walked into the hall of the hotel. "I economised in the matter of rooms. So we may as well go up by the lift. Shall I tell the porter to have a four-wheeler ready in five minutes?"

"Oh, do anything you like," said Seale. "No, you needn't bother about that now, though. There are cabs always ready. Here, come along; there's a lift just going up."

Two minutes later Captain Charteris opened a door and showed Seale a pretty child of six asleep in a deep armchair. She woke as they came into the room, nodded to Charteris, and stared at his companion critically. For once in his life Seale was tongue-tied before a lady. He somehow or other felt unutterably mean, though (as he carefully explained to himself) there was no just cause for this feeling. And as an effect, all initiatory small talk left him. There was a long silence in the room, and it was the child who first broke it.

"You must be the gentleman," said she to Seale, "who is going to take care of me?"

"No," he answered sullenly, "I am not."

"Oh," said Nancy, leaning back in her chair again, "I am sorry for that."

Seale could not help asking "Why?"

"Because," came the answer, "I like you. I

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like you better than him," she added with a nod across at her steamer escort.

"This is gratifying," said Charteris. "But I am afraid, young lady, that it is a rather useless avowal. Now we've come to take you out for a drive somewhere. So suppose you put on your hat and jacket."

"Can't," said Nancy, cheerfully. "I've not begun to dress myself yet. I'm not growed up enough for that. But you," she said with a nod at Seale, "can put on my things for me if you like. They're all lying there on that sofa. Shoes first."

"Oh, look here," said Charteris, "we'd better ring for the stewardess — chambermaid, I mean."

"No," said Seale; "I may as well do what I can for the kid. Hang it, man! let me do something. God knows I'm feeling brute enough as it is."

So with infinite pains and clumsiness he put on Nancy's outdoor raiment, and when he had finished, he stepped back to overlook his handiwork.

"Well?" she said.

"What?" he asked.

"Don't I look nice?"

"Ye-es, I suppose you do. Yes, distinctly you do."

"Then what are you waiting for?"

"I don't understand."

"The others," said Nancy, judicially, "when they dressed me, and when I was good, and

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when I looked nice, always gave me a kiss to finish up."

Charteris laughed.

Seale turned on him savagely with a "Drop that!" Then he stooped and took hold of the child's hand and said, "Come on."

"Kiss first," said Nancy. "I've been good."

Shamefacedly Seale pecked at her with his mouth, and Charteris laughed again. "I wouldn't do it," said Charteris, "if I were you. That sort of thing leaves a nasty taste afterwards — when you remember she is rigged in workhouse uniform, you know."

Seale kissed the child again, this time more scientifically. "Now, look here," he said, "we'll just drop that foolishness, please, for always. If you think I'm going to let this jolly little beggar go to the parish pauper shop, you're badly mistaken. What will become of her in the end, I'm damned if I know; but for the present, and until something turns up, I'm going to take her off to my own rooms; and my landlady and I'll dry-nurse her between us. We shall probably make a poor enough job of it, because funds are very scarce; but I guess we're about the only opening Nancy has before her at present. Come along, Nancy, and we'll drive off in a rubber-tired hansom to my palatial chambers."

"I say," said Charteris, as they were going back along the corridors, "you're rather a good sort, you know."

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Seale turned upon him with a sudden glow of passion. "I'm about the most unlucky brute in London this minute," he cried, "and if there's one man I ought to hate, that's you. You've landed me in the devil of a mess, and there's no getting out of it. You knew what she was; you'd seen her; and I don't think you did the fair thing not telling me beforehand. Of course, I thought that being Hankin's kid, she'd be — well, just fit for the workhouse. How was I to know that she was like this?"

"You're a bit unreasonable."

"I'm not going to argue with you," said Seale. "The thing's done, and I've got no use for you any further."

"I don't quite take your meaning."

"Well, it's this, Captain Charteris: what little I've seen of you will last me the rest of my time. You may say good-bye to Nancy if you like, but you needn't bother to shake hands with me. I wish you were at the devil."

III

When a young man of twenty-three deliberately adds to his bachelor household an attractive young lady of six summers, who speaks foreign languages and possesses a history, attention is naturally drawn to the performance. Seale's acquaintances, especially the feminine portion of them, were first curious, and then shocked; and

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out of sheer justice to Nancy he had to tell one or two of them the true story of Hankin. The news spread through that small fraction of London which knew Seale, and the regard with which it had previously regarded him changed with a very short prelude. It is no use giving dinners to a young man with no expectations who has deliberately chosen to cumber himself with a scamp's brat; and if you have daughters, it is a mad thing to ask to your dances a wretched fellow whom it would be the utmost misfortune for your daughter to fall in love with. And so the invitations ceased with brisk unanimity; and as Seale had been accustomed to much going out and about, he saw fit to do it now on his own resources, which of course cost money.

How he managed to keep going for the next seven years is a matter best known to himself and Nancy, who at an early stage was initiated into the art of circumventing *res angusta domi* and living at the rate of twice one's income. But there is a certain amount of enjoyment to be derived from sailing close to the wind, and a *camaraderie* grew up between the two of them that was very pleasant in its completeness. At the same time, that he might not accuse himself of hoodwinking youth, Seale used to instil morality as he went along.

"Y' know we're awful blackguards, old lady, having things and not paying for them the way we do," he would say; "and I ought to be

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kicked for showing a kid like you the style it's managed."

Upon which Nancy would retort: "All right, Ted, I quite understand. But it's me that's to blame, not you. If there was no me to fritter money over, you'd live on your pay and have a lot left over. So as far as you're concerned, it doesn't count."

And then after Seale had solemnly assured her that she was completely wrong, and that he (by reason of his seniority) carried the sin of the pair of them on his own shoulders, they would go off to a theatre, or West for dinner, by way of getting rid of the taste of the lecture.

But this style of living, ingenious though it may be, is liable to be brought to an end from the outside; and when the conclusion did finally come, Seale's only matter for surprise was that it had not arrived several years earlier.

"Old lady," said Seale, one day when he had lit up his cigar after dinner, in the big chair beside the fireplace, "the bank's given me the chuck."

"Phe-ew!" said Nancy.

"At least they've told me of another billet that's open, and said that if I don't resign nicely and take it with a smile, I shall probably find myself out of a job altogether. The manager seemed to think that my ideas of personal finance were too florid to be quite healthy in a mere bank clerk."

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"Where's the new billet?"

Seale laughed. "In a place you've heard of before — Lagos. One year on duty and six months' leave, with steamer fare paid home and back. Three hundred a year and allowances to draw all the time."

"My!" said Nancy, "what a lot! It's a heap more than you're getting now. We'll go, eh?"

"You won't, anyway."

"Why not? Don't we do everything together? I shall come and keep house for you, and save you lots. You can't keep house a bit, Ted."

"Shall have to. I —— Nancy, come here, old girl."

Nancy came across the hearthrug, and sat herself upon his knee, and lay back luxuriously.

"Nancy, I've been an awful brute to you. I've kept you here because I liked having you, when you ought to have been away at school with other girls, learning things."

"I have been learning," said Nancy, stoutly. "I've had lessons with you nearly every day. I can read, and write, and mend socks, and do accounts, and order a dinner. Isn't that enough?"

"Nowhere near," said Seale. "You're growing up, you see. You're thirteen now, and you'll be in long frocks in a year or so, with your hair in a knob, and the Lord knows what else; and there are things a girl ought to learn that I can't teach; and — well, I'm a dam' bad lot, old lady,

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and if you go away to a decent school, you'll learn that is so."

"Ter-waddle," said Nancy. "Didn't you saddle yourself with me, and doesn't that prove you to be the best man in the world? 'Tisn't as if I'd never seen any others of the boys. I've met 'em, lots of 'em, and that's why I know what I say's right. And besides, it would never make any difference to me whether you were the biggest sweep on earth, or the biggest angel. You're just my Ted, and that's all I care about."

"Yes; but, Nancy, you couldn't go to the Gold Coast, anyway. You'd lose all your good looks for one thing ——"

"Don't care."

"But I do. I'm proud of them, if you are not. And besides, you'd spoil all the arrangements. This way: you see I get allowances for one only. If you went, there'd be your steamer fare to pay, and an establishment to keep up. And that would run away with all the cash. Whereas if I go alone, I shall get everything paid; come back with all my screw saved; and then you and I can spend the six months' leave on the jolliest spree imaginable."

But Nancy did not see it, and said so with point and argument. However, for once in his life Seale was firm. He had a feeling that he would have a much better chance, and a much better time of it, if he started this new life on the Coast as a bachelor without encumbrances.

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Still, he did not work openly upon this principle. He said he was leaving Nancy behind, entirely for Nancy's good. But in the end, of course, he got his way.

IV

A B. and A. boat took Seale across the Bay, and after calling at several African ports, brought up to an anchor head-on to a heavy swell in the Lagos Roads. A small branch-steamer came out to her from inside the bar, and Seale tasted the joys of being transhipped in a tossing surf-boat paddled by yelling Elmina boys. The branch-steamer deposited him at one of the wharves which jut out from the boulevard of the Marina into the lagoon, and his new chief met him there with a pink 'rickshaw and a white umbrella.

Knowing that Lagos is a town of negroes, Seale had somehow or other been prepared to find unlimited stinks; and because these were entirely absent, the air of the place came to him as a pleasant surprise. He settled down in two large, cool, whitewashed rooms, and proceeded to enjoy himself.

Being newly landed and full of health, he naturally found the work expected of him ridiculously light; and as he had occasion to put on his dress clothes every night, and discovered that white men in Lagos are addicted to gorgeous dinners and much hospitality, he told himself

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with confidence that the Coast had been unjustly maligned, and that he had tumbled into a very snug berth. He retained this ecstatic frame of mind for exactly fourteen days, and then one morning a man came into his office and asked him to dinner for that evening.

"Can't," said Seale. "Much obliged all the same. I'm chopping with Anderson to-night. And so, by the way, are you, although I suppose you've forgotten. He asked us yesterday."

"You've got to go to Anderson's funeral in two hours' time," said the other man, dryly. "He pegged out with heat apoplexy during the night, just before that tornado came on. Ta-ta, see you at the cemetery. And mind you turn up to dine with me. Seven-thirty sharp."

The other man nodded and left, and Seale mopped a very moist brow with his pocket-handkerchief. "This," he told himself, "was the very devil of a climate." And by way of having the lesson rammed home, he was invited to stand and frizzle in the sun, precisely one week later, whilst the flippant other man was himself being buried.

Seale was consumed with a mild touch of Coast fever that night, and the fear of death gripped him by the heart. He reviewed much of his past life, and was truly sorry that he had not amended his ways earlier, and so avoided coming to Lagos. He laid much solid blame upon Hankin, and told himself that he could

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dance with calm delight upon Hankin's tomb. Incidentally he remembered Nancy, and tried to carry his resentment along to her; but that did not act. No, it was no fault of Nancy's that he was out in this abominable exile. She was a good little beggar anyhow, and a hot, new trouble rose in him when he thought of what must happen to her after he died, as (he was quite sure) must take place within the next few hours.

However, of course, he did not die then; and as an early dose of fever is the very best thing to acclimatize a man, he soon settled down into a very healthy fellow from a Coast point of view. But that early scare had bitten in deeply, and it prevented him from remaining popular with the Lagos community. Where every one is lavishly free-handed, the careful man who does not keep open house is not called careful merely. They give him an uglier name. And if a man of any obstinacy once overhears himself spoken of as "that stingy brute," he is rather apt to act up to the character. Besides, every time the dangers of the place were brought home to him more nearly, either by illness within the marches of his own proper body, or by the news of death amongst the white community, Seale could have screamed aloud in his agony of dread as to what would happen if Nancy were left unprovided for.

Yet torment himself how he would, the fund

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which he was making for her grew with exasperating slowness. He had to eat and drink to live; and everything was expensive; and the pay and allowances which had seemed dazzling enough at a distance, shrivelled wofully when counted on the spot. Moreover, he had always possessed the unwieldy knack of making two shillings go as far as one, and had never contrived to shake himself adrift from it. And so when the time of his first leave came round, he drew his home-pay and accepted a six months' billet in the bush for extra lucre. He wrote home to tell Nancy that he was so hard-worked that he could not get away — which was scarcely true — and also that he was in brilliant health at the time of writing, which was a solid lie.

His next leave he also tried to miss, but broke down with dysentery, and had to spend a much-grudged two months in Grand Canary to save his life. But he came back to the Coast again with new health, and hammered desperately at the dollar-mill to make up his leeway. He was not liked in Lagos still; but a rumour had got about that there was a reason for his stinginess, and some of the men had got a respect for him — though of course that is a vastly different thing from a liking.

And at the end of four and a half years from his leaving England, Captain Charteris came to him again and put a change into his life, as he had done once before.

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Seale had not forgotten his old animosity against the man; and when he first brought his face into the office quite unexpectedly — for Charteris had come into money, and was living at home as a decent English gentleman now — Seale bade him uncivilly enough to get out, one-time.

"You must hear my message first," said Charteris, "although I'm repeating an old offence."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm bringing Nancy to you. She's upstairs, waiting in your house this minute, and I've just come down here to break the news."

"What! Nancy here! Man, you're either dreaming or drunk."

"I am neither, although I wish I was both. The Lord knows I've no cause for rejoicing."

Seale sat at his office desk and passed a finger round inside his shirt collar. "You'd better explain," he said.

"Quite so. To begin with, Hankin — or rather his ghost — is interfering again. It seems he once invested money in one of the Coast mines here at Axim. That followed the habit of most gold mines by going pop. But they've found magnificent quartz reefs on either side of his property; and so the ground has been valued at ninety thousand pounds; and, what is better still, has been sold for eighty thousand pounds and paid for. That's Nancy's now, and nothing would

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suit her but that she must come down here and give you news of it herself."

"My God!" said Seale. Then after a minute he added, "But what have you come down here for?"

"Because," said Charteris, slowly and quietly — "because I love her."

"You love Nancy! You! You love that child! But there, I suppose she's grown up. Well, are you going to tell me next that the pair of you are to be married?"

Charteris looked at him queerly. "Shouldn't you mind," he asked, "if I did tell you that?"

"I shouldn't like it. To be candid, I don't particularly care for you, as you know. But I suppose she'll marry some day. I always have pictured that, ever since I've been on the Coast, because, you see, she must be provided for some way."

"But man! don't you care for her yourself?"

"Care for her!" Seale gave a mirthless laugh. "If you knew what I've been doing here all these years, you wouldn't ask that. Of course I care for her."

"But how?"

"Oh, I've never defined it. Paternally, I suppose, or like a brother. That kid and I were the best of friends."

"Seale, you're a fool! Kid, you say. She's a woman. She's the loveliest —— But I'm not going to talk. You must see for yourself. Only,

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don't you go upstairs and make any mistake. She's got no daughter's feelings for you, or sister's; and if you go and break her heart over any nonsense of that kind, I've got it in me to shoot you for your pains. I've had my life ruined for me during these last months by you being in the way, and if hers is to be spoiled too by your blundering, you can understand that I shall want to kill you very badly."

"Wait a minute," said Seale, unsteadily. "This has come upon me with so much suddenness that I hardly grasp ——"

"I have no more to say to you," said Charteris, and he went out into the dazzling sunshine of the Marina, where the shouting negroes were carrying loads over the brick-red dust.

Seale swayed and tottered, then pulled himself together with an effort, and went up the stairs which led to his house above. Nancy knew his footstep and met him at the door, a radiant vision in tropical white. He felt himself tangled by her arms. Her lips were against his ear. "Oh, Ted! my love," she was saying to him, "I could not wait away from you any longer. Ted, darling, I had to come. Oh! my own love, if you only knew how I had hungered for you, you would have come to me sooner."

Then Seale's eyes were opened. He did not make the blunder which Charteris had warned him against. He felt no inclination that way. A new feeling towards the girl surged within

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him like a glow of fire. "Sweetheart," he whispered back to her, "I never knew you would be like this. If I had known, I could never have kept myself away from you."

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IV

THE CHOLERA SHIP

SHE was not the regular Portuguese mail. She was an ancient seven-knot tramp, which had come across from Brazil to Loanda, and had been lucky enough to pick up half a cargo of coffee there for Lisbon. She called in at Banana, the station on the mangrove-spit at the mouth of the Congo, where the river pilots live (and on occasion die), and where the Dutch factory used to bring trade till the Free State killed it with duties; and at Banana she had further fortune. There were two hundred and thirty negroes there, Accra men and Kroo-boys mostly, a gang that had made their fifteen or twenty pounds apiece on the railway, and were waiting to go home.

The passenger-boys had collected their chattels, and were gathering in a howling, chattering mob by the surf-boats ready to go on board, when the first notion came to me of joining her. It was the Danish harbour-master who gave it. He came up, under his old white umbrella with the green lining, to the house where I was staying, and told me that the tramp was going to call in at San Thomé and the Bonny River.

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"Now, we don't hanker to get rid of you here, Mr. Calvert," he said, "but if you want to climb that mountain in Fernando Po, you're not likely to get so good a chance for the next three months to come. Your place is on the road between San Thomé and Bonny, though, of course, you'll have to make it worth the skipper's while to stop. But that's your palaver."

"Can you put a figure on it?" I asked.

"I should take it," said the harbour-master, "that you could hustle the man into Fernando Po for ten sovereigns. He's only a Portugee. Come aboard now in my gig and see him."

The tramp's interior was not inviting. We went into the chart-house and drank the inevitable sweet champagne with the captain; and whilst the bargain was being made, a thousand cockroaches crawled thoughtfully over the yellow-white paint.

"I tell you straight," said the harbour-master in English, "she's a dirty ship, and the chop'll be bad enough to poison a spotted dog. But if you will go to these Portugee and Spanish places to sweat up mountains, that's part of the palaver."

"Oh, if the grub's good enough for them, it won't kill me."

"Then if you will go, I'll send my boy off in the boat for your boxes one-time, because the Old Man's in a hurry to be off. He's got a bishop on board below, very sick with fever, and he wants to be out of this stew and get to

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sea again as quick as it can be done. Thinks it'll give the ship bad luck, I suppose, if the bishop pegs out."

The harbour-master's boy was speedy, and the harbour-master himself piloted us out into the wide gulf of the river's mouth. The beer-coloured stream gave up its scent of crushed marigolds strongly enough to pierce through the smells of the ship and the smells of the crowded chattering negroes on the fore-deck, and the old steamer began to groan and creak as she lifted to the South Atlantic swell. The sun went down, and night followed like the turning out of a lamp. The lighthouse flickered out on the Portuguese shore away on the port bow, and above it hung the Southern Cross, a pale, faint thing, shaped like an ill-made kite.

The bumping engines stopped, and the Dane came down off the upper bridge. He stood with me for a minute on the brown, greasy deck planks, and then went down the ladder into his boat.

"Oscar-strasse, tretten, Kjobnhavn!" he shouted, as the gig dropped astern. "Mind you come. I shall be home in another nine months."

"Wanderers' Club, London; don't forget; sorry I haven't a card left," I hailed back, and wondered in my mind whether in any of the world's turnings I should ever meet that good fellow again. But the steamer was once more under way, mumbling and complaining, and the store-keeper at that moment was beginning to

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open the case of dried fish — baccalhao, as they call it on the coast — to which we traced back the hideous plague which in the next few days swept away her people like the fire from a battery of guns.

There were only two other passengers besides the bishop and myself — a pair of yellow-faced, yellow-fingered Portuguese from down the coast, traders both, with livers like Strasbourg geese. The Skipper was a decent, weak little chap from Lisbon, who might have been good-looking if he had sometimes washed; the Chief Engineer was a Swede, who spoke English and quoted Ibsen; and the other officers I never came specially across. There was only one of my own countrymen on board, a fireman from Hull, one of the strongest men I ever met, and certainly the most truculent ruffian. His name was Tordoff on the ship's books, but that was a "purser's name." He spoke pure English when he forgot himself, and certainly had once been a gentleman.

It was baking hot down below, and the place was alive with rats and cockroaches. I rigged a wind-scoop through the port in my room, got into pyjamas, and lay down on the top of the bunk. But I can't say I did much business with sleep; the menagerie held cheerful meetings all round, and the perspiration tickled as it ran off my body in little streams; and these things keep a man awake. My room was to starboard, and when through the porthole I saw day blaze

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up from behind the low line of African hills, I turned out, rolled a cigarette, and went on deck. I was just in time to see the first funeral.

Four very frightened-looking men and a profane mate were fitting a couple of biscuit sacks over a twisted figure which lay on the grimy, greasy deck planks. They pulled one over the head and another over the heels, and then with a palm and needle made them fast about the figure's middle. Afterwards they lashed a fire-bar along the shins, and then, with faces screwed up and turned away, they lifted the body as though it had been red-hot, and toppled it over the rail.

The dead man dived through the swell alongside almost without a splash; but, as though his coming had been a signal, a dozen streaks of foam started up from various points, each with a black triangular fin in the middle of it; and I did not feel any the happier from knowing precisely what that convoy meant.

However, the sharks and the body drifted away into the wake astern, and I rolled another cigarette and got a chair and sat on the break of the bridge deck. From there I saw the mate and his four hands fetch one by one five other bodies out of the forecastle, and prepare them for burial. Three they covered with canvas; and then the supply of biscuit sacks seemed to run out, because the last two they put over the side with the fire-bar attachment only.

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The fifth man had to be content with four participators in his funeral. The remaining sailor held strangely aloof; his face turning through a prism of curious colours; his body swaying in uncouth jerks. As the fifth corpse toppled over the rail, this fellow threw himself down on the hatch cover, and lay there writhing and screaming in a torment of cramps.

At that moment a man in a white serge cassock, which reached to his heels, came out of one of the forecastle doors and walked rapidly across to the new victim. He was a long, lean man with a hawk's nose, and bright, large eyes. The skin of his face was like baggy yellow leather, and it was dry with fever. As he knelt beside the writhing sailor, I saw the metal crucifix nearly fall from his thin hands through sheer weakness. He was the Portuguese bishop from down-coast, of course, and when I remembered that he had just been through black-water fever (which is own brother to yellow jack) I judged that, from a human point of view, he was behaving with exquisite foolishness in meddling with first-crop cholera patients. But I respected him a good deal for all that, and went and got opium and acetate of lead and gave the man on the hatch a swingeing dose. It was a useless thing to do, because the chap had got to die, and one incurred one's own risks by going near him; but if that bishop was a fool, I had got to be a fool too, and there was an end of it.

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Mark you, I wasn't feeling a bit frightened then. I'd been through cholera-cramp in India, and knew what my chances were, and was ready to face them without whimpering; though of course I'd freely have given every farthing I was worth to have been snugly back in the Congo again. But the thing had got to be seen through, and I intended to keep my end up somehow. I couldn't afford to die like a rat in a squalid hole like that.

I had breakfast all to myself that morning, because no one else turned up; and afterwards the captain did me the honour to call me into consultation. My Portuguese is off colour, but I speak enough to get along with.

"You English know so much about these things," he said.

"We keep clean ships," I answered, "and when anything goes wrong on them we do not lose our heads. Also we try to trace our way back to the root of evils. How did this plague start?"

"You must have brought it on board at Banana. We had none in the ship before you came."

"We did not bring it. There is no cholera in the Congo now. And, moreover, your passenger-boys are none of them sick. You must try back further."

We did that together laboriously; and at last traced the mischief to that fatal case of baccalhao

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which had been shipped at Bahia, an infected port; and had this essence of pest promptly thrown to the sharks. Next we went into the question of hands.

"I have not enough firemen and trimmers left to man a single watch," said the captain. "The cholera hit the stoke-hold first. The fellows who are working there now have stood three watches on end, and they are hardly making enough steam to give her steerage way."

"If you let your old beast of a tramp stop and drift about here like a potato-chip in a frying-pan, it won't improve matters. Those of us who don't peg out with cholera will start murdering one another. The niggers will begin."

"Yes, I know. I wanted some of them to serve as firemen for good pay. But they will not listen to me. I do not think they understood. Will you come and translate?"

We took revolvers, holding them ostentatiously in our pockets. We crossed the dizzy sunshine of the lower main deck. The negroes on the forecastle head were chattering together like a fair of monkeys, but they ceased when we came up, and stared at us with faces working with excitement.

"Which be head-man?" I asked.

A big fellow stood forward, hat in hand. "I fit for head-man, sar."

I told him hands were wanted for the stoke-hold, and that the gorgeous pay of four shillings English per diem was offered.

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"We no fit for stoke, sar," said he. "We gen'lemen wid money, sar. We passenger-boys, sar."

"Very well, daddy," said I. "But stoke you've got to. And if you won't do it civilly, you'll do it the other way. Now, my frien', pick me out twelve good strong boys. If you don't do it, I'll shoot you dead one-time; if they won't work, I'll shoot them. You quite savvy?"

We got the men and they went off to the stoke-hold, frightened and raging. Poor wretches, eight of them toppled over in the next twenty-four hours, and half-a-day later the engines stopped for the last time. I was smoking industriously under the alley-way, and Tordoff came and loafed near me.

"I'm a bally fine chief-engineer, aren't I?" said he.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I'm the best man that's left of all our crowd, that's all. They're every sinner of them dead, black men, white men, and Portuguese. Where are we now?"

"Slap bang under the equator. That mountain-top sticking out of the water is San Thomé."

"Then I'm off there," said Tordoff. "This bloomin' steamer's played out. She can't steam, and she wouldn't sail if there was any wind, which there isn't. I shall take one of the boats and skip. You'd better come too."

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"What for? Why not?"

"Because there are only two boats and they aren't enough for all hands."

"The boats will hold all the white men, or them that call themselves white. But if you are one of the missionary crowd that hold niggers as good ——"

"I'm not. I know what niggers are, and therefore I'm not an Exeter Hall fool about them. I'll make free to tell you this boat-game's been thought of before; but that bishop says he won't leave the niggers to peg out alone; and if he's going to be idiot enough to stay, I am going to be another idiot. That's the size of it."

"Well," said Tordoff, "I've got no use for that kind of foolishness myself, and if you're left, you needn't come and haunt me afterwards. You've had the straight, square tip. And you'll do no good by spreading this palaver about. If any one tries to stop us, there'll be a lot of men killed. We aren't the kind of crowd that'll stick at trifles if we're meddled with. So long!"

He slouched off, and I went to the deck of the bridge and looked down on a curious scene. The main deck was a shambles. There were a score of corpses there, pitching about stiffly to the roll of the ship, with no one offering to touch them. There were a score more of sick, shrieking and knotting themselves in their agony. The survivors were in two sorts of panic — the comatose, and

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the madly violent. A crowd of yelling, dancing negroes, most of them stark naked, had set up a ju-ju on a barrel of the fore-deck winch, and were sacrificing to it a hen which they had stolen from one of the coops. The little wooden god I knew: it was one that I had picked up in the Kasai country, and I was taking it home as a curiosity. It had been lifted from my own state-room by some prowling negro, and was now receiving fresh daubs of red blood amid the clamour of frantic worshippers. It was quite a reasonable thing to expect under the circumstances. But what threw the action of these savages into grotesque relief was the sight of another man crouched in prayer beside the bulwarks. It was the bishop. His tottering hands were pinning the crucifix to his hollow chest; his hips were swaying under him with weakness; his dry, cracked lips moved noiselessly; and the molten sunlight beat upon him as it pleased.

The sight of that man gave me a bad feeling. Before I knew quite how it happened, I was down on the frizzling main-deck, and the ju-ju had been plucked from the winch barrel and flung over the side, together with the tortured hen, and I was fighting for my life amongst a crowd of furies. Tordoff was there too (though I'm sure I don't know how he came), and thanks to him I got back again on to the bridge deck; but the bishop did not come with us. He stayed down there amongst those sullen animal blacks, imploring

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them, praying with them, soothing them. He was a braver man than I, that Portuguese.

Another night came down, and the steamer wallowed in inky blackness. In the morning we were still more helpless. The mates, the few remaining sailors, the stewards and cooks, and the two yellow traders had gone; the captain lay in the alley-way with a knife between his shoulder-blades; the bishop and I and Tordoff were the only white men remaining on board. Yes, Tordoff. I went into the pantry smoking a cigarette, and found him there, eating biscuits and raisins.

"You here?" I said. "Why, man, I thought you cleared out with the rest."

"No," he said, "I thought it would be fine to stay behind and be able to scoff the cabin grub just as I pleased. I just stayed for the grub, and it's worth it."

"You're rather a decent sort of liar," I said; "do you mind shaking hands?"

"I don't see the need," he said; "and besides, I'm using my hands to eat these raisins; but you may kick me if you like. There isn't a redder fool than me in both Atlantics. By the way, how's the padre?"

"Very sick. I looked into his room and found him lying in his bunk. He couldn't talk."

"I put him there. 'Found the old fool preaching to those beasts on all fours this morning, and looked on till he dropped; then I lugged him under cover."

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"Any more dead?"

"Five pegged out during the night. They were lying pleasantly in and amongst the others, and there were seven more sick. I told the head-man when I went down with the padre to have them put over the side or I'd kill him. And when I came back I found he'd shoved over the whole dozen. The man-and-a-brother's a tolerable brute when he comes to handling his own kind, Mr. Calvert."

We went out then and set the passenger-boys to washing down decks. We could not give them the hose because there was no donkey working; but they drew water in buckets and holystoned and scraped and scrubbed till they cleaned the infection out of the decks, and sweated it out of themselves. The cholera seemed to have exhausted itself. There were three other cases, it is true, but they were mild, and none died. In their fright the boys would have chucked their friends overboard as soon as they were taken sick, but I promised the head-man to shoot him most punctually if any one went over the side who was not a pukka corpse, and if niggers were addicted to gratitude (which they are not), there are gentlemen now living on the Kroo coast who might remember me favourably. For we did get in. A B. and A. boat picked us up three weary days later, and towed us at the end of an extremely long hawser into the very place to which I wanted to go.

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Of course Fernando Po, being Spanish, kept us very much at arm's length; and we did a thirty days' most rigid quarantine, which made (after the last case had recovered) a matter of forty days in all. But we had no more deaths, and the bishop pulled up into fine form. He was not a man that I could ever bring myself to like, and as Tordoff was for the most part sullen and unwishful for talk, the time that we swung to our anchor off Port Clarence was not exhilarating.

Still it was pleasant to think that one was alive, and to realise that one had got respectably out of a very tight corner — yes, one of the tightest. The tramp's two boats never turned up again. I suppose they carried cholera away with them, and drifted about in the belt of equatorial calms, full of sun-dried corpses, till some tornado came and swamped them. So that we three were the only Europeans left out of thirty-four, and of the two hundred and thirty negroes who left Banana in the Congo, only seventy-four came to Fernando Po. It was a tolerable thinning out; but when it came to climbing the peak, that made up for all which had gone before. Indeed, it is a wonderful mountain.

I saw Tordoff again just as I was going away from the island, and tried to put it to him delicately that I was not badly off, and would like to give him a lift if the thing could be managed.

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"No, Mr. Calvert," he said, "thanks. I prefer to go to the devil my own gait. I don't suppose you'd ever know who I am; but if anybody describes me and asks, just say you haven't seen me."

And that is the last I have seen or heard of him. It is extraordinary how one drifts away from men. But, on the other hand, I should not be in the least surprised at stumbling across Tordoff again, in purple and fine linen for choice on the next occasion.

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V

THE HERMIT

I

WHEN ladies go alligator-hunting, they should clearly understand that people whom they find, and associate with most freely, in an Alabaman *bayou* should not always be bowed to in Piccadilly. This sounds simple; an axiom, in fact; but because Miss Wilcoxn did such an uncalled-for bowing, things happened which put two most respectable families in a condition of open fury, and I earned dislike as the Origin of Evil.

As a matter of accuracy, my yacht-mate was far more guilty than I. He had gone a-fishing one day in his shirt, and had spent eight hours sandwiched in between wind and water, and had naturally returned with his legs bitten red raw by the sun. He developed a temper in consequence that would have made him shunned in the Pit, and I was driven into a deed of temporary separation.

But first, as I am standing here on my defence, let it be clearly understood that I found Atcheson before I knew Miss Wilcoxn was yachting with

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the Van Sciaks in Mobile Bay, before, in fact, I knew that the lady was in America at all. I had seen her last in a West Kensington drawing-room, and (if the complete truth be told) had slipped her from my thoughts with a perfunctory hand-shake. One meets so many people.

Moreover, Atcheson was introduced by the Fates. Being ignorant of the man's existence, I naturally did not seek for him specially. He lived two days deep in swampy country, which is not yet charted in the United States maps.

Our yacht was then in the Bayou of Bon Secours (which opens off Mobile Bay), and the Man with the Sunburnt Legs said, with many adjectives, that movement for him was out of the question. He remarked that he would stay on the sloop and fish for gaff-tops'ls (as they call the cat-fish), and cavallos, and sheep-heads, and sharks, and haply for tarpon, and indeed whatever else he could get; and said that polite conversation was a strain to him. He stated that our crew (of one negro) would make a suitable butt for his future remarks, and put forward the suggestion that I should take myself off. "Go and hunt alligators up the lagoons, and live like a savage in the swamps, and eat crackers and trout, and catch fever if there's any throwing about," said the Man with the Sunburnt Legs; "that'll be about your form." So I pitied the nigger and went off — in pale pink pyjamas, and the ten-foot yawl-boat.

The sail to the head of the bayou was simple.

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Then there were two miles to be punted to the long, narrow sliver of lagoon which lies inside the sand-dunes of the Mexican Gulf. The cypresses, and the black pines, and the magnolias arched above the cut, and fronds of palmetto which grew on clumps of soil, slashed at one like knives. The atmosphere was a hot, moist stew, and there was a smell about it half-way between rotten eggs and the Harrogate pump-room. Also there were flies in all abundance, which fancied themselves masterless dogs, and bit accordingly.

The subsequent sail down the lagoon, under a brazen torrent of sunshine, came as one of the seven pleasures of life. There was a great wall of trees on the landward side, rearing itself from the water's lip in a hedge of undergrowth. To southward, from over the rambling line of dunes, with their fringes of scrub-grass and palmetto, came the dim bellow of the surf as it creamed and crumbled on the white Gulf sand. And down the silver ripples of the lagoon there blew an air, faintly salt, which chilled the wet cotton against one's spine, and pushed the yawl-boat on with the tinkle of fountains under her stem.

The lagoon bayed to an end, and there opened out another channel to be punted through — a narrow, winding canal of twirls and branches, through quaking marsh land, a waterway rustling with fish and ablaze with yellow lilies. Cardinal-birds peered at one from the bushes, and purple herons thrust out curious beaks from the grass-

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clumps. It was all very peaceful, and extremely hot.

Then there came a lake with islands, a lake of water called by courtesy fresh, which was lemon-yellow to look through, and black to look upon. It swarmed with fish, which took the hook, and were supped upon for their sins; and because there was no whisky in the yawl-boat for dilution, it served as a beverage in all its sulphurous nastiness. Then the sun dipped behind the forests at the back, and night followed like the shutting down of a box. One mounted a bull's-eye lantern on the hat-band, which would shine down a rifle's sights, and put out again in the boat, paddling stealthily. It is not always easy to distinguish between a firefly and the gleam from an alligator's eye, and shots are apt to be wasted and the neighbourhood scared. But on that night fortune helped, and the lead went home six several times. Then the dead were made more safely dead with the axe, and their slayer laid him down to sleep on the boat's floor, with his head beside the centreboard trunk.

So passed my first night away from the sloop. The morning was occupied in the process of skinning, and then once more on towards the east. There were more lakes and more canals all full of their own new wonders; and ever away in the distance, on the starboard hand, was the noise of the surf as it broke where the logs from the Gulf rivers bristle in the milky sand. In late

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afternoon I came to a lagoon with a wooded island in it, and amongst the trees of the island, when they grew distinct from one another, I saw a man.

I bore down to him under sail (for there was a spanking breeze coming in from the sea), and when we were within hailing distance, the boat grounded.

"Do you want to land here?" he shouted.

"I don't mind if I do."

"Then shove off again and drop down to the tail of the island, and luff up sharp where you see a barked tree on the beach. There's no deep water till you come to there."

I did as he told me, put the boat's nose on a small beach of pebbles, and waited, smoking. I waited half an hour maybe, and then he strolled up very leisurely with his thumbs in the waist-belt of his trousers. I can't say he seemed over pleased to see me. He asked with point what I had come for.

I told him, and then said, "By the way, you're a 'Varsity man, aren't you?"

"Yes, Oxford: the House. You are, too, I've a notion?"

"From over the way: Clare."

"Well, if you've nothing better on, leave your boat and come up to my place. Sorry I didn't tumble to you at first, but then you don't look over respectable just now. Are you much down on your luck?"

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"Oh, I'm not hunting alligators professionally. I'm here for amusement."

I concluded he was there because he had got into trouble with the Law of the Land elsewhere, but I did not suggest this, because it is considered rude to touch upon family matters uninvited. But after a minute he broached the topic himself. "I'm here for amusement myself," he said. "I'm here permanently."

By this time we had got into a bit of a clearing inside the wall of trees — a patch of sorghum, another of sweet potatoes, another of corn with stalks that stood ten feet high, and a goodly planting of green tobacco plants, with a shambling palmetto shack at the back.

"Faith," I said, "you've queer notions of a pleasure resort."

"I'm a man," he said, "with an imagination. Consequently I make a most comfortable hermit. Come in and take a hammock. Where's our eight on the river?"

I told him, and we went on hard at boating shop till the sun went out. It was wonderful what a lot of men we knew in common when we began to talk things over, and it turned out that we had rowed against one another at Henley for two events. "Of course," he broke out at once; "you are the M'Cray who swam down from Marsh lock to Henley bridge in your clothes the last night of the races, because you said you hadn't been allowed a decent dip all through the

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training." And "By Jove!" I said, "you are Atcheson of the Leander who steered their Stewards' four from bow, and ran five feet of her through the side of an oak dinghy." Whereat we both laughed, and knew one another extremely well. After this I asked him if he ever ate.

"Why, yes," he said, "I'd forgotten. What'll you have? There's some boiled fish, and sweet spuds and molasses. The fish is on the floor in the far corner there, and the rest is mixed ready in the saucepan. There are no plates. Help yourself."

"Candles?" I suggested.

"Haven't such a thing; or lamp. Can't you feed in the dark? There will be a moon above the tree-tops directly, if you want a light."

"I say, am I to ladle up this stuff with my fingers?"

Atcheson laughed. "I'm not going to lend you mine," he said. "Why, what a luxurious sybarite you must be. Climb back, M'Cray, down the centuries, and enjoy yourself as Primitive Man. Feast and be filled, and then come to your hammock again and talk intellectually. There's a tin down there somewhere with some water in it, or coffee, I forget which. Drink when you're dry."

I began to have a strong idea that the man was mad; but I stopped my hunger on his victuals for all that; and then relit my pipe and went on with the talk.

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From the other side of the clearing came the noises of the night — the chatter of katydids and the rustle of jarflies, the love-song of tree crickets and toads, the deep reed notes of frogs in their patches of marsh; and through all mingled the heavy diapason of the surf, from across the dunes, and the forest, and the black water of the lake, mellowed by its passage through the purple night. I am the most practical and unpoetical creature in the world, as a general thing, but the influence of it was too heavy for me. I started on to chat again about the boats, and about women, and yachts, and books, and the other interests of the outer world; but the things fell flat, and presently the talk died out of us altogether. We lay there, hung in silence, and sensuously drinking in what the night gave up. We must have spent hours without throwing down a word.

Then Atcheson spoke. "That is my usual concert," he said. "One gets to like it."

I did not answer at once. I could not, although his words came clearly enough to my ears. A sort of mesmeric doze pinned me down.

When I managed to rouse, I felt angry with myself for weakness, and spoke with a sneer. "You must find it mighty monotonous," I said.

"A mistake, an utter mistake. It is full of infinite variety: it never repeats itself; and I know, because I have listened to it now for three years, in calm, in cyclone, in every kind of night

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which God will give. It is His orchestra, but until the taste has grown, one does not know this."

Another pause. Then, "Are you going to write about this Walden Pond of yours?" I asked.

"I am no Thoreau with a pen. Besides, I am selfish, and if I could set this down, I would not. One man in ten thousand might understand, some wild fellow, who had lived in the air, with the things that grow in the air away from the pestilence of cities, and *he* would never lift a book; but the others would either yawn or deride, and I take it this is no matter to be profaned. And yet there is nothing new in it all: only the old things changed. I have rambled over the world, and seen and tried most pleasures; the sounds here give it all back to me again, only here it is idealised."

"I hardly understand."

"Listen to the Gulf surf rumbling on those beaches."

"It is like the roar of the Prater, or the Strand, or the Rambla, or Broadway, as it comes to an upper window."

"You can hear that: I can make out more, because my ear is trained. I can hear the voices and what they say — the tales of love, and hope, and hate; the merry laugh, the curses, the wild and bitter laugh; and in the tree-tops yonder I can see these people who move and live, and follow them as they pass along, with their skirts

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rustling, and their shoulders jostling one another. The place is full of life to me and full of company, and I can revel in it all without being mixed in the dirt and the pains and the squalor. And it is very beautiful also. What picture did you ever see like that?"

He flung a hand to where the red moon and a patch of purple sky hung framed in a black arch of the pines. In the foreground the lake lay twinkling beyond a great fan of palms. On the flank was spread a thick magnolia tree, full of scented blossom, and splashed with cones of coral pink.

I looked, and hung on my gaze; and once more the silence grew between us.

The spell of the place was closing down again and pinning me. I raised myself with an effort, and swore for relief. "Atcheson," I said, "I believe you are either the devil, or Circe, with a changed sex. Be merciful and speak no more, and let me sleep. If I listen on, I shall forget the place from whence I am come, and stay here, and become as one of the swine."

"I am sorry," Atcheson said, "and because I do not want converts or companions I will say no more. Therefore sleep you."

II

The miasma of the lotus was in my veins, and I knew it and feared. I woke sullen and sus-

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picious with the first lift of day, and got down to my boat. Atcheson came after and cried a pleasant *auf wiedersehen*, and I answered with a scowl and threw out the sculls. I was very angry with myself, and still more frightened. I had been in that kind of temptation before, and knew what it was afterwards to wish that I had fallen. Consequently I made up my mind to get back to the yacht without a halt, and so put in a day of savage toil; and because the sun above burned like a kettle of molten brass, and the air baked, the material pains of the body gave me other matters to think about. And when I made out the sloop's riding-light dancing on her forestay, I knew there was another antidote close at hand. The Man with the Sunburnt Legs was a very carnal and practical sort of person.

He received me affably. He fed me first with sumptuousness, referred to the decrease of his own affliction, and then told me that we and the oysterman no longer had the bayou to ourselves.

"The Van Sciaks have come in with their schooner," he said; "and they've a girl on board who says she knows you — a Miss Wilcoxn."

"Ah," I said, "I know her well enough. We used to see a goodish deal of one another once."

"If you mean that you were spoons on the lady," said the Man with the Sunburnt Legs, "I guess you'd better forget that. She's engaged to

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a Yankee man from Massachusetts now, a person with culture and dollars — heaps of dollars — about ten million of 'em, so I believe. And being *anno aetatis suae* twenty-eight, she knows what is a soft thing, and is not likely to chuck it up. Take off those rags and put on something respectable, and we'll make the nigger scull us across. She said I was to bring you when you turned up."

"Not now. At present I am going to turn in to sleep. Probably I shall die in the course of the night. It will save me the trouble and pain of kicking myself if I do."

"Did you," said the Man with the Sunburnt Legs, "in the course of your wanderings find a place where they sold corn-whisky? Oh, you're snoring already, are you? Well, I hope it's merely drunk you are, my son, because otherwise you've come back very dotty. What rot, to go and live like a hermit all by your lonesome self."

III

Miss Wilcoxn was a young woman with a great notion of having her own way. Had I known her less, I should have tried to avoid speaking on a matter which I preferred to keep silence upon. Being acquainted as we were, I did not bring out any futile stubbornness.

She wanted to know what there was to be seen in the lagoons and lakes, and I told her, with one

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reservation; but my tale did not quite hold water, and she twigged that there was something left out, and demanded to hear what it was. Whereupon I shrugged my shoulders helplessly, and told her about Atcheson, chapter, commas, and verse, merely lying in the solitary instance of a personal name.

"You say that he is a Christ Church man?" she demanded, when I had finished.

"Did I say so?"

"You did; and you mentioned also that he rowed against you at Henley for the Stewards' and the Ladies' Plate. That fixes him. If you'd done me the compliment to remember, I was down there on a houseboat that year. And so, of course, his name isn't Foote at all?"

"Perhaps it's got changed," I admitted weakly. "Men's names do, you know, when they climb down the scale as he's done."

"Hum," she said, and pulled down a chart of the Northern Gulf Coast from its cleat in the cabin roof. "Now show me exactly where this hermit lives."

"That chart's all wrong. The place in there isn't surveyed."

"Precisely. But you've been there, and you know the lay of it. Don't be shy. Your powers, my dear Mac, in that direction are notorious. Here's a pencil. Fill it in accurately, and tell me the landmarks from the Gulf side."

"If you go up there, and see this fellow, and

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sleep even one night in those swamps, you'll catch fever and die. Also, the mosquitoes and the sand-flies will eat most of you before death comes. Don't be a fool. What more do you want to know about the man? Stay here, and I will tell you."

"My excellent Mac, I have pumped you dry. For the rest I must see him myself. And I shall not die of fever, because I shall get this yacht to take me round to the outside, and go from there, and so not have to spend a night ashore at all. Nor will the insects of the swamps devour me, because I own a wide-brimmed hat, and a large and most excellent veil."

"Well," said I, "if you will do this thing, at all events you shall do it decently. There's a small creek on beyond, up which we will incite the Van Sciaks to take the yacht. I'll bring our sloop. We will go with the pretence of alligator-hunting."

"You are an excellent person, Mac. You always see your own tastes aren't trampled on."

"My dear Mary, the alligator-shooting is a piece of deception for which I blush. It is entirely on your behalf that I take up any more of it. You ought to be extremely grateful; not sarcastic. Go now and wheedle the Van Sciaks, and I'll be off and get my own boat under weigh."

In an hour's time the two yachts were standing out board and board over the shallow bar which guards the entrance to the Bayou of Bon Secours.

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There was a romping breeze from the nor'ard, and we span at eight knots past the low shore, where only the tree-stems show above the water. Then we slipped out through the channel between Dauphin Island and Fort Morgan, and lifted to the swing of the outer sea, running east along the Gulf Coast. Night had fallen before we made the creek, and we tacked in over the bar by blazing moonlight, with centre-boards up, and the breeze eddying light and fitful through the trees. That night we took the rifles and the bull's-eye lanterns, and shot a dozen alligators by way of giving ourselves countenance.

Of course, Miss Wilcoxn did go to see Atcheson. I took her to the island myself, through an intolerable maze of lakes and waterways, and told the Van Sciaks that we hoped to slay alligators by daylight, which is probably the baldest excuse a grown man with a pretty invention ever made. But I will give the girl credit for one thing — she didn't stay talking to the fellow for more than ten minutes. What she said to him I don't know, because my instructions were to stay by the boat and see that it didn't drift away. But when she came back, and we rowed off, she found cause to comment that Atcheson was a curious handful.

"I told you that before," I said. "Now you've learnt it for yourself, I trust you're satisfied?"

"I am entirely, Mac. I hope you are, too?"

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"I don't know about that. But I do know I'm extremely hot."

"Well, then, hurry and get back, and I'll fix you up a mint julep. We've ice on board, and all the other necessaries, and Mr. Van Sciak has shown me how to use a swizzle-stick. He said it might come in useful, as I had thoughts of settling in America, don't you know?"

"So I've been given to understand. As you have not had my congratulations before, please accept them now in all fulness. I suppose I'm scratched from the running now?"

"Cŏm-pletely, my dear boy. And it doesn't surprise you in the least, or disappoint you, either. We'd have quarrelled like cat and dog. We've no tastes in common. For instance, except for perhaps once, I loathe alligator-hunting."

And so we went back, and I was rewarded, not with one julep only, but several.

The Van Sciaks wanted to go to Mississippi Sound next day, and as the other man and I were bound for Pensacola, in Florida, the yachts separated, and I did not see Miss Wilcoxn again for some time. But I heard of some of her doings, which, to say the least of them, seemed eccentric. Also, which was worse, they were unworldly. Young men with culture and ten million dollars are not to be picked up every day; nor should they be thrown lightly aside.

But when I got back to Town, and, to my vast astonishment, saw Atcheson there, then a

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light began to dawn upon me. He was marching down Pall Mall as large as life, and very resplendent. He had on a very beautiful tail coat, the last gift of the gods in the way of hat and tie, and a new-reaped chin, which stood out refreshingly white against the rest of his countenance. He shook me by the hand and said I was a great man. Then we went into a club and talked for several hours without a stop, and he explained to me how a hermit cannot hermitize, unless he has a disease vulgarly known as the "hump."

"It's enjoyable enough whilst you have that," said Atcheson, "but when the hump goes, the bottom's knocked out of the hermit business altogether. What a filthy, squalid brute I must have been all that time."

"But you liked it well enough."

"I believe I did, in my morbid way. But it's over and done with now, thank heaven! and 'I'm going to marry Yum-Yum, Yum-Yum, your anger pray tarry——' Oh, bother, I've forgotten the words. Jove! I shall have a lot to pick up again."

"That's a fact," I said. "Ordinary sanity amongst other things. And so you're going to marry Mary Wilcoxn, after all?"

"It's a sure thing. Of course, her people were mad, because I'm not very well off, don't you know; and the other Johnnie's people are mad, too, at his being cut out. But you're the person

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they can't get over. It's you they are wild at principally. They will persist in it that you are at the bottom of the whole thing. Isn't it delightfully funny?"

But I didn't think it funny at all. I make quite sufficient enemies off my own bat for personal consumption. And, besides, as I have said, if the other fool hadn't got his legs sunburned, I shouldn't have gone off *solus* in the yawl-boat, nor meddled with Atcheson at all.

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VI

THE LIZARD

It is not in the least expected that the general public will believe the statements which will be made in this paper. They are written to catch the eye of Mr. Wilfred Cecil Cording (or Cordy) if he still lives, or in the event of his death to carry some news of his last movements to any of his still existing friends and relations. Further details may be had from me (by any of these interested people) at Poste Restante, Kettlewell, Wharfedale, Yorkshire. My name is M'Cray, and I am sufficiently well known there for letters to be forwarded to wherever I may be at the moment.

The matters in question happened two years ago on the last day of August. I had a small high-ground shoot near Kettlewell, but that morning all the upper parts of the hill were thick with dense mist, and shooting was out of the question. However, I had been going it pretty hard since the twelfth, and was not sorry for an off day, the more so as there was a newly-found cave in the neighbourhood which I was anxious to explore thoroughly. Incidentally I

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may mention that cave-hunting and shooting were then my chief two amusements.

It was my keeper who brought me news to the inn about the impossibility of shooting, and I suggested to him that he should come with me to inspect the cave. He made some sort of excuse — I forget what — and I did not press the matter further. He was a Kettlewell native, and the dalesmen up there look upon the local caves with more awe than respect. They will not own up to believing in bogles, but I fancy their creed runs that way. I used to have a contempt for their qualms, but latterly I have somehow or other learned to respect them.

I had taken unwilling helpers cave-hunting with me before, and found them such a nuisance that I had made up my mind not to be bothered with them again; so, as I say, I did not press for the keeper's society; but took candles, matches in a bottle, some magnesium wire, a small coil of rope, and a large flask of whisky, and set off alone.

The clouds above were wet, and a fine rain fell persistently. I tramped off along one of the three main roads that lead from the village; but which road it was, had better remain hidden for the present. And in time I got off this road and cut over the moor.

What I was looking for was a fresh scar on the hill side, caused by a roof-fall in one of the countless caves which honeycomb this limestone

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district; and although I had got my bearings pretty accurately, the fog was so thick up there that I had to take a good dozen casts before I hit upon the place.

I had not seen it since the 8th of August, when I first stumbled across it by accident whilst I was going over the hill to see how the birds promised for the following twelfth; and I was a good deal annoyed to find by the boot marks that quite a lot of people had visited it in the interval. However, I hoped that the larger part of these were made by shepherds, and perhaps by my own keepers, and remembering their qualms, trusted that I might find the interior still untampered with.

The cave was easy enough to enter. There was a funnel-shaped slide of peat-earth and mud and clay to start with, well pitted with boot marks; and then there was a tumbled wall of boulders, slanting inwards, down which I crawled face uppermost till the light behind me dwindled. The way was getting pretty murky, so I lit up a candle to avoid accidents, stepped knee-deep into a lively stream of water, and went briskly ahead. It was an ordinary enough limestone cave so far, with inferior stalactites, and a good deal of wet everywhere. It did not appear to have been disturbed, and I stepped along cheerfully.

Presently I got a bit of a shock. The roof above began to droop downwards, slowly but relentlessly. It seemed as though my way was



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soon going to be blocked. However, the water beneath deepened, and so I waded along to inspect as far on as possible. It was a cold job, for the water was icy, but then I am a bit of an enthusiast about cave-hunting, and it takes more than a trifle of discomfort to stop me.

The roof came down and down till I was forced into the water up to my chin, and the air too was none of the best. I was beginning to get disappointed: it looked as if I had got wet through to the bone with freezing cold cave water for no adequate result.

However, there is no accounting for the freaks of caves. Just when I fancied I was at the end of my tether, up went the roof again; I was able to stand erect once more; and a dozen yards further on I came out on to dry rock, and was able to have a rest and a drop of whisky. The roof had quite disappeared to candle-light overhead, so I burned a foot of magnesium wire for a better inspection. It was really a magnificent cave.

But I did not stop to make any accurate measurements or drawings then, and for reasons which will appear, I have not been near to do so since. I was too cold to care for prolonged admiration, and I wanted to (so to speak) annex the whole of the cave's main contours before I took my departure. I was first man in, and wished to be able to describe the whole of my find. There is a certain keen emulation about these matters amongst cave-hunters.

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So I walked on over the flat floor of rock, stepping over and through pools, and round boulders, and dodging round stalactites which hung from the unseen roof above, and slipping between slimy palings of stalagmite which sprouted from the floor. And then I came to a regular big subterranean tarn which stretched right across the cavern.

Spaces were big here and the candle did little to show them. It burned brightly enough and that pleased me: one has to be very careful in cave-hunting about foul air, because once overcome by that, it means certain death if one is alone. The air in this cave, however, did not altogether pass muster; there was something new about it, and anything new in cave smells is always suspicious. It wasn't the smell of peat, or iron, or sandstone, or limestone, or fungus, though all these are common enough in caves; it was a sort of faint musky smell; and I had got an idea that it was in flavour rather sickly. It is hard to define these things, but that smell, although it might very possibly lead to a new discovery, somehow did not cheer me. In fact at times, when I inhaled a deeper breath of it than usual, it came very near to making my flesh creep.

However, hesitations of this kind are not business. I nipped off another foot of magnesium wire, lit it at the candle, and held the flaming end high above my head. Before me the water

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of the tarn lay motionless as a mirror of black glass; the sides vignetted away into alleys and bays; the roof was a groined and fretted dome, far overhead; and at the further side was a beach of white tumbled limestone.

I pitched a stone into the black water, and the mirror woke (I was pleased to think) for the first time during a million years into ripples. Yes, it's worth even a year of hard cave-hunting to do a thing like that.

The stone sank with a luscious *plop*. The water was very deep. But I was wet to the neck already, and didn't mind a swim. So with a lump of clay I stuck one candle in my cap; set up a couple more on the dry rock as a light-house to guide my return; lowered myself into the black water, and struck out. The smell of musk oppressed me, and I fancied it was growing more pronounced. So I didn't dawdle. Roughly, I guessed the pool to be some five-and-thirty yards across.

I landed amongst the white, broken limestone on the further side, with a shiver and a scramble, and there was no doubt about the smell of musk now; it was strong enough to make me cough. But when I had stood up, got the candle in my hand again, and peered about through the dark, a thrill came through me as I thought I guessed at the cause. A dozen yards further on amongst the tumbled stone was a broken "cast," where some monstrous uncouth animal had been en-

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tombed in the forgotten ages of the past, and mouldered away and left only the outer shell of its form and shape. For ages this too had endured; indeed it had only been violated by the eroding touch of the water and some earth tremor within the last few days: perhaps at the same time that the "slip" was made in the moor far above, which made an entrance to the caves.

The "cast" was half full of splintered rubbish, but even as it was I could see the contour of its sides in many places, and with care the débris could be scooped out, and a workman could with plaster of Paris make an exact model of this beast which had been lost to the world's knowledge for so many weary millions of years. It had been some sort of a lizard or a crocodile, and in fancy I was beginning to picture its restored shape posed in the National Museum with my name underneath as discoverer, when my eye fell on something amongst the rubble which brought me to earth with a jar. I stooped and picked it up. It was a common white-handled penknife, of the variety sold by stationers for a shilling. On one side of it was the name of Wilfred Cecil Cording (or Cordy), scratched apparently with a nail. The work was neat enough to start with, but the engraver had wearied with his job; and the "Cecil" was slip-shod, and the surname too scratchy to be certain about.

On the hot impulse of the moment, I threw the

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knife far from me into the black water, and swore. It is more than a bit unpleasant for an explorer who has made a big discovery to find that he has been forestalled. But since then I have more than once regretted the hard things I said against Cording (if that is his name) in the heat of my first passion. If the man is alive, I apologise to him. If, as I strongly suspect, he came to a horrible end there in the cave, I tender my regrets to his relatives.

I looked upon the cast of the saurian now, with the warmth of discovery quite gone. I was conscious of cold, and moreover the musky smell of the place was vastly unpleasant. And I think I should straightway have gone back to daylight and a change of clothes down in Kettlewell, but for one thing. I seemed somehow or other to trace on the rock beneath me the outline of another cast. It was hazy, as a thing of the kind would be if seen through the medium of sparsely transparent limestone, and by the light of a solitary paraffin-wax candle. I kicked at it petulantly.

Some flakes of stone shelled off, and I distinctly heard a more extensive crack.

I kicked again, harder; with all my might in fact. More flakes shelled away, and there was a little volley of cracks this time. It did not feel like kicking against stone. It was like kicking against something that gave. And I could have sworn that the musky smell increased. I felt

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a curious glow coming over me that was part fright, part excitement, part (I fancy) nausea; but plucked up my courage, and held my breath, and kicked again, and again, and again. The laminæ of limestone flew up in tinkling showers. There was no doubt about there being something springy underneath now, and that it was the dead carcass of another lizard, I hadn't a doubt. Here was luck; here was a find. Here was I, the discoverer of the body of a prehistoric beast preserved in the limestone down through all the ages, just as mammoths have been preserved in Siberian ice.

The quarrying of my boot-heel was too slow for me. I stuck my candle by its clay socket to a rock, and picked up a handy boulder and beat away the sheets of the stone with that; and all the time I toiled, the springiness of the carcass beneath distinctly helped me. The smell of musk nearly made me sick, but I stuck to the work. There was no doubt about it now. More than once I barked my knuckles against the harsh, scaly skin of the beast itself — against the skin of this anachronism which ought to have perished body and bones ten million years ago. I remember wondering whether they would make me a baronet for the discovery. They do make scientific baronets nowadays for the bigger finds.

Then of a sudden I got a start: I could have sworn the dead flesh moved beneath me.

But I shouted aloud at myself in contempt.

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"Pah!" I said, "ten million years; the ghost is rather stale by this!" And I set to work afresh, beating away the stone which covered the beast from my sight.

But again I got a start, and this time it was a more solid one. After I had delivered my blow and whilst I was raising my weapon for another, a splinter of stone broke away as if pressed up from below, flipped up in the air, and tinkled back to a standstill. My blood chilled, and for a moment the loneliness of that unknown cave oppressed me. But I told myself that I was an old hand; that this was childishness; and, in fact, pulled myself together. I refused to accept the hint. I deliberately put the candle so as to throw a better light, swallowed back my tremors, and battered afresh at the laminated rock.

Twice more I was given warnings and disregarded them in the name of what I was pleased to call cold common reason; but the third time I dropped the battering stone as though it burnt me, and darted back with the most horrible shock of terror which (I make bold to say) any man could endure and still retain his senses.

There was no doubt about it, the beast was actually moving.

Yes, moving and alive. It was writhing, and straining, and struggling to leave its rocky bed, where it had lain quiet through all those countless cycles of time, and I watched it in a very

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petrifaction of terror. Its efforts threw up whole baskets full of splintered stone at a time. I could see the muscles of its back ripple at each effort. I could see the exposed part of its body grow in size every time it wrenched at the walls of that semi-eternal prison.

Then, as I looked, it doubled up its back like a bucking horse, and drew out its stumpy head and long feelers, giving out the while a thin, small scream like a hurt child; and then with another effort it pulled out its long tail and stood upon the débris of the limestone, panting with a new-found life.

I gazed upon it with a sickly fascination. Its body was about the bigness of two horses. Its head was curiously short, but the mouth opened back almost to the forearm; and sprouting from the nose were two enormous feelers, or antennæ, each at least six feet long, and tipped with fleshy tendrils like fingers, which opened and shut tremulously. Its four legs were jointless, and ended in mere club feet, or callosities; its tail was long, supple, and fringed on the top with a saw-like row of scales. In colour it was a bright grass-green, all except the feelers, which were of a livid blue. But mere words go poorly for a description, and the beast was outside the vocabulary of to-day. It conveyed somehow or other a horrible sense of deformity, which made one physically ill to look upon it.

But worst of all was the musky smell. That

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increased till it became well-nigh unendurable, and though I half-strangled myself to suppress a sound, I had to yield at last and give my feelings vent.

The beast heard me. I could not see that it had any ears, but anyway it distinctly heard me. Worse, it hobbled round clumsily with its jointless legs, and waved its feelers in my direction. I could not make out that it had any eyes; anyway they did not show distinct from the rough skin of its head; its sensitiveness seemed to lie in those fathom-long feelers and in the fleshy fingers which twitched and grappled at the end of them.

Then it opened its great jaws, which hinged, as I said, down by the forearm, and yawned cavernously, and came towards me. It seemed to have no trace of fear or hesitation. It hobbled clumsily on, exhibiting its monstrous deformity in every movement, and preceded always by those hateful feelers, which seemed to be endued with an impish activity.

For a while I stayed in my place, too paralysed by horror by this awful thing I had dragged up from the forgotten dead to move or breathe. But then one of its livid blue feelers — a hard armoured thing like a lobster's — touched me, and the fleshy fingers at the end of it pawed my face and burned me like nettles. I leaped into movement again. The beast was hungry after its fast of ten million years; it

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was trying to make me its prey; those fearful jaws ——

I turned and ran.

It followed me. In the feeble light of the one solitary candle I could see it following accurately in my track, with the waving feelers and their twitching fingers preceding it. It had pace, too. Its gait, with those clumsy, jointless legs, reminded one of a barrel-bellied sofa suddenly endowed with life, and careering over rough ground. But it distinctly had pace. And what was worse, the pace increased. At first it had the rust of those eternal ages to work out of its cankered joints; but this stiffness passed away; and presently it was following me with a speed equal to my own.

If this huge green beast had shown anger, or eagerness, or any of those things, it would have been less horrible; but it was absolutely unemotional in its hunt, and this helped to paralyse me; and in the end when it drove me into a *cul de sac* amongst the rocks, I was very near surrendering myself through sheer terror to what seemed the inevitable. I wondered dully whether there had been another beast entombed beside it, and whether that had eaten the man who owned the penknife — Cordy, or Cording, his name was.

But the idea warmed me up. I had a stout knife in my own pocket, and after some fumbling got it out and opened the blade. The feelers with their fringe of fumbling fingers were close to me. I slashed at them viciously,

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and felt my knife grate against their armour. I might as well have hacked at an iron rail.

Still the attempt did me good. There is an animal love for fighting stowed away in the bottom of all of us somewhere, and mine woke then. I don't know that I expected to win; but I did intend to do the largest possible amount of damage before I was caught. I made a rush, stepped with one foot on the beast's creeping back, and leaped astern of him; and the beast gave its thin, small scream, and turned quickly in chase after me.

The pace was getting terrific. We doubled, and turned, and sprawled, and leapt amongst the slimy boulders, and every time we came to close quarters I stabbed at the beast with my knife, but without ever finding a joint in its armour. The tough skin gave to the weight of the blows, it is true, but it was like stabbing with a stick upon leather.

It was clear, though, that this could not go on. The beast grew in strength and activity, and probably in dumb anger, though actually it was unemotional as ever; but I was every moment growing more blown, and more bruised, and more exhausted.

At last I tripped and fell. The beast with its clumsy waddle shot past me before it could pull up, and in desperation I threw one arm and my knees around its grass-green tail, and with my spare hand drove the knife with the full of my force into the underneath of its body.

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That woke it at last. It writhed, and it plunged, and it bucked with a frenzy that I had never seen before, and its scream grew in piercingness till it was strong as the whistle of a steam engine. But still I hung doggedly on to my place, and planted my vicious blows. The great beast doubled and tried to reach me; it flung its livid blue feelers backwards in vain efforts: I was beyond its clutch. And then, with my weight still on its back, it gave over dancing about the floor of the cavern, and set off at its hobbling gait directly for the water.

Not till it reached the brink did I slip off; but I saw it plunge in; I saw it swim strongly with its tail; and then I saw it dive and disappear for good.

And what next? I took to the water too, and swam as I had never swam before—swam for dear life, to the opposite side. I knew that if I waited to cool my thoughts, I should never pluck up courage for the attempt. It was then or not at all. It was risk the horrors of that passage, or stay where I was and starve—and be eaten.

How I got across I do not know. How I landed I cannot tell. How I got down the windings of the cave and through that water alley is more than I can say. And whether the beast followed me I do not know either. I got to daylight again somehow, staggering like a drunken man. I struggled down off the moor, and on to the village, and noted how the people

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ran from me. At the inn the landlord cried out as though I had been the plague. It seemed that the musky smell that I brought with me was unendurable, though by this time the mere detail of a smell was far beneath my notice. But I was stripped from my stinking clothes and washed and put to bed, and a doctor came and gave me an opiate; and when twelve hours later wakefulness came to me again, I had the sense to hold my tongue. All the village wanted to know from whence came that hateful odour of musk, but I said stupidly I did not know. I said "I must have fallen into something."

And there the matter ends for the present. I go no more cave-hunting, and I offer no help to those who do. But if the man who owned that white-handled penknife is alive, I should like to compare experiences with him; and if, as I strongly suspect, he is dead, these pages may be of interest to his relatives. He was not known in Kettlewell or any of the other villages where I inquired, but he could very well have come over the hills from Pateley Bridge way. Cording was the name scratched on the knife, or Cordy: I could not be sure which; and, as I have said, mine is M'Cray, and I can be heard of at the Kettlewell Post Office, though I have given up the shooting on the moor near there. Somehow the air of the district sickens me. There seems to be a taint in it.

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VII

HELD UP

ALTHOUGH he did attempt most callously to slay me in my boots within half an hour of our ceasing the game, I will say that Quintal played dollar-limit poker like a gentleman. So also did the fat man; but as he rarely opened his lips except to raise or call, his agreeableness was more of a negative order.

Quintal, on the other hand, was as good a conversationalist as I've met — a trifle new Englandish, to be sure, but none the less entertaining. We were the only three passengers in the Pullman, and had foregathered in the smoking-room, where we doffed our coats in deference to the heat. Within three minutes from our meeting, Quintal had read a label on my grip-sack and proceeded to make himself known.

"My name's Hugh H. Quintal, sir. I see you are Mr. Calvert, and I guess from the Old Islands. Delighted to make your acquaintance. How do you like our country?"

The transition from this to draw-poker was natural and easy. We commenced with quarter-limit; sprang this to fifty cents for fear lest the

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game should get slow; and, on crossing the border out of North Carolina, raised the limit to a dollar, because South Carolina is a prohibition state, and we were saving money by being allowed no drinks.

I had luck, and rather more than held my own; but the fat man played by far the smartest game of the three, gave his whole attention to it, and won money. Quintal did the paying. He was useful enough with the cards, but he would let his attention wander. He talked on ten new subjects every quarter of an hour. His nerves seemed to be on springs.

We played in our shirt-sleeves because of the heat. Once when I had got up and turned to get a handkerchief from my jacket which was hanging from one of the brackets, he said, "It's plain to see you're not an Amurrican, Mr. Calvert."

I laughed, and placed a suggestive hand upon my hip. There was no sly-pocket there. "Oh, yes," said I, "that's been commented on before; but I prefer not to go heeled. You know we've an insular prejudice in favour of our hands. And I'm pretty useful with them."

Mr. Quintal shook his head. "Gimme a gun, sir, and then I'm safe. I know your British theory of rushing a man before he's lined you on his bead. But I don't hold to them fancy touches. I'm no acrobat myself. I guess I'd feel very mean if a gentleman was to start pumping lead into my lot and I'd no show to

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see him better. You see, sir, where I was raised they told me this proverb: 'Whoso tarrieth on the draw, and landeth not his bullet on the correct button, that man shall be planted before he reacheth prime.' No, siree; it's the invariable custom amongst gentlemen in the South to carry a gun in the hip pocket, because they know it's as conducive to health as the habit of wearing shirts. You bet they don't tote a pistol round for the fun of the exercise. Now I must go and suck at the ice-water. I guess this temperature's making me lard some."

We played on another score of rounds, and then the conductor came in and affably informed us that Byronville was the next stoppage.

"Getting out?" inquired the fat man.

"No, I'm going through."

"So are we," said Quintal. "Eh, well, I'm loser over this gamble, so I can propose. What do you say to dropping the game after Byronville? We've a long run on to the next stop, and we shall have the Pullman all to ourselves. There'll be nobody getting on here, only an old nigger or so for the second class. We might peg out claims in this car and throw in an hour's siesta. I guess we're too hot ourselves to put much fever into poker just now."

The fat man stacked the cards by way of answer, and chucked them on the table. We settled for our outstanding chips. I put up my feet on the seat and nodded wearily. Then the

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other two yawned, mopped their faces, and passed through the alley-way to the other end of the car.

Forests passed by the window, cornfields and plantations of bumble-bee cotton, and then more forests; and then the cars passed through a red, rain-furrowed cutting, and rumbled out over a trestle. They were travelling fast, and swayed a good deal. The motion would have made some people sea-sick. Me it sent off into a doze, spite of the heat.

Of a sudden I was disturbed. My eyelids rose with a snap, and I sat up listening. Then the sound which had aroused me was repeated — a woman's shrill cry, a squeal brought out by arrant terror. I dropped to my feet, strode through the doorway of the smoking-room, and down the alley-way behind it. The Pullman was empty.

Above the clang and rattle of the train I could make out one voice speaking in loud tones from the next car, to the blurred accompaniment of women's sobs. Had I been anything but a tenderfoot then, I should have stopped in my tracks, thanked God for leaving me out of a mess, and done nothing more. As it was I opened the door at the end of the Pullman, crossed the swing gangway, and entered the next car — the ordinary first class.

There I saw a sight which filled me with amazement. All the passengers in the car, men and women alike, to the number of quite two dozen,

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were sitting with their hands forked out above their shoulders. They looked for all the world as though they were voting eagerly upon some pressing question. In truth they were doing this — they were voting against being shot; and the fat man of my recent acquaintance was standing in the further doorway of the car, with a heavy revolver in each fist, superintending their election.

His beady eye caught me on the moment of my entrance, and the pistol muzzle swung up and covered me. Though the whole length of the car separated us, that tube of iron seemed to grow till its black depths were wide enough for a dog to crawl in.

"Up with your hands, you meddling fool; or you're a dead man!"

The hail put spirit into me again. I would not shame my manhood by joining in this tame surrender. I turned sharply and fled, and the fat man's bullet coming faster, snipped the lobe of my ear. Then I got on the steps of the platform, and the noise of the train drowned the sounds from within the car.

The sear of the pistol-shot made me dizzy for the moment, and I hung on to the iron cleat at the angle of the car for a good minute without taking any action. I was adding up the situation.

The Pullman was empty: the folk in the first-class car were "held up" by the fat man with an

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obvious view to pillage. But forward of that there was the second-class car, where the coloured people travel, and which was certain to be tenanted by a small number of white men who wanted to smoke. Forward, again, were a brace of express cars with the usual complement of baggage men of both tints of complexion. It was obvious that the fat man could not hold these in awe, and equally obvious that some one else was preventing them from taking him in the rear. As the majority of the whites disregard that law of the United States anent the carrying of concealed weapons, so also do the coloured sections. A male nigger without a razor hidden somewhere about his person is a biped mighty hard to find.

"So," thought I, "there's bound to be another man in this, and if he doesn't coincide with friend Quintal, I'm Yankee. Now I can understand his nervous chatter in the smoking-room. I don't owe him any personal grudge, but on general principles I'm going to try and damage this new game, if it's only to prove that fists may stand against pistols."

With that I set to and clambered on to the roof of the first-class car, a job which was by no means easy, because the eaves sloped, and the train was swinging and swaying most consumedly. But I landed at last, ran along, and jumping three gaps, reached the further end of the foremost express car.

The engineer stuck his head through a win-

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dow of the cab, stared for a moment with blank amazement, and then covered me with a prompt revolver.

"Don't shoot!" I yelled, and then told him what was happening. "You'd better pull up," said I.

"What, and play their game? Not likely. I guess I'll steam 'em right up to the calabose at the next stop."

He had hardly got out the words through his teeth when a heavy grinding roar made itself heard down all the length of the train, and speed was perceptibly slackened.

"By gum," said the engineer, "they've more *savvy* than I gave 'em credit for. They've got at something — sliced through the linking pipe of the Westinghouse with a bowie, likely — and that's 'down brakes' all along. This blame' old kettle 'll never pull them cars up the next grade agin that drag."

"Then come along with me, and rush the scoundrels from this end of the train."

The engineer snorted. "I allow you are queer, mister. No fancy shootin' for me. 'Sides, I've me engine to see after. She'll cough herself to a standstill directly."

I considered the engineer a coward, but didn't say so, because of his pistol. However, I didn't choose to stay where I was like a stray rooster on the shingles, so I jumped to the coals on the tender, and clambered thence on to the platform

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of the foremost express car. I opened the door gingerly and peered in.

A man in shirt-sleeves was coming through the opposite entrance at a run. The quick snap of a pistol shot rang out from behind him, and the man stumbled. Then he gave an upward spiral leap like a dervish, and pitched heavily forward on to the floor. Not the ghost of a cry escaped him, and the thud of his fall was drowned by the hoarse grinding of the brakes. As he lay, I saw that the back of his skull was smashed in like an egg.

For thirty seconds I remained rooted in my tracks staring stupidly at the horror before me. The man was the express agent. These two foremost cars were his own territory. The thick of the turmoil, as I understood it, lay amongst the passengers' compartments behind; and yet this man had been murdered when to all seeming he was in full retreat. The matter was beyond my comprehension.

Gaining courage, I worked my way down between the stacks of trunks and boxes with which the car was crammed, and, stepping over the corpse, cautiously opened the door. The gangway was tenantless.

The door of the second express car swinging idly on its hinges, showed me that the car itself held nothing animate except a coop of game-fowls. The desertion of the place puzzled me: there should have been baggage men in evidence.

Crossing the car to the further door, I opened

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it a couple of inches, and reconnoitred through the cranny. Then I gathered what had taken place. Quintal had burst upon the express cars and driven the occupants before him towards the rear of the train. One of the whites had broken back, and fate had overtaken him in the manner I had seen. The rest, marching in grotesque procession with hands thrust up like masts above their heads, were, as I watched, forming rank down the centre alley-way of the second-class car; and, falling in with them, were coloured folk of both sexes and white passengers who had come there to smoke.

Quintal, revolver in hand, was marshalling the procession; his eye quick to note every movement, his big voice speaking clearly of life and death. He held that crowd of eight-and-twenty people cowed as broken-winged pigeons. Indeed, three or four of the men trembled so violently that they could barely keep their feet. The women were frightened naturally, but none were so bad as this; perhaps they had a lingering assurance that sex would preserve them from anything more deadly than wordy scare.

The procession closed up till the breast of each member lay on the shoulder-blades of his predecessor, and then with shuffling steps it moved down the car. The door was latched. The foremost man pressed it, and, slewing round his head between the framework of his arms, showed me a face of incarnate terror.

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"I cayn't get through, boss. Lemme drop one of my fists to turn the handle? I ain't got no gun about me, boss, an' I swow I wont ——"

"Keep your claws up," thundered Quintal. "If you're not past that door before I count ten, I'll blow you through it. One — two — three —"

The frightened face turned away and pressed against the woodwork, and the man's clenched hands beat frantically on the door above his head.

"Four — five —"

The procession rustled and shivered. It felt that murder was very near.

"Six — seven — eight."

The long file of people instinctively compressed itself. Each man thrust his hardest. A mulatto woman shrieked in pain. The door, yielding to the pressure, burst widely open, and the man against it shot out headlong. He clutched at the rail, and missed it, toppled down the steps, and fell on to the side of the track, rolling over and over like a half-filled bag. The others filed out along the gangway and entered the first-class car, joining the other passengers already held under the fat man's pistol.

I saw all these things clearly, and understood, then, how two men could stick up a train-load. The majority know quite well their potential strength, but what they lack is an initiative. Each man may want to fight, but no man dares to make the first burst, because he knows for a fact

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that whatever happens to the rest, his own death is certain.

Now, I had far too great a respect for Quintal's marksmanship to advance upon him from the open; but when, after clearing the second-class car, he turned abruptly towards the express car, I fancied I'd a goodish chance of getting to hand-grips with him.

I waited in the angle behind the door, rigid as a box. With ears at their highest strain, I made out the sharp crunch of his footsteps advancing across the gangway between the cars.

Then his knuckles appeared on the edge of the door, and in an instant my right palm clapped down upon them. I swung myself round with all the pace I could muster, intending to let him have the left squarely between the eyebrows; but — taken by surprise though he must have been — Quintal was too quick for me; indeed, the man's rapidity of action was something almost more than human. He had no time to raise a pistol higher than his hip, but as I came to his view round the angle of the door, he pulled on me from there, and the bullet raked the skin above my ribs like a hot iron, and the powder lit my clothing with a splash of flame.

The shock made me loosen my grip on his fingers and stumble back over the coop which held the game-fowls. Before I could recover my feet he was standing inside the car, covering me with a steady pistol muzzle.

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"So you aren't killed, Mr. Calvert?" said he. "'Say, put up your hands quick — quick, siree, or you'll die in your boots yet; I never miss a man twice; and now march to the other end of the car, whilst I manipulate these two empty shells."

He brought another fully-charged revolver out of a pocket, and, shifting it to his right hand, cast out the two spent cartridges from the other and refilled the chambers, holding the weapon in the grip of his knees whilst he managed the breech with his left hand.

"Nippy at it, aren't I, Mr. Calvert? That makes me a twelve-shot man once more; but now — as the train has come to a standstill on this grade, as I calculated it would — we must get to business. Oblige me by taking up the iron safe in the corner yonder and rolling it through the side door out on to the track."

"Do your dirty thieving yourself," said I, sullenly.

He didn't say anything; he lifted up his right-hand pistol to a line with my face, steady as though it had been glued there. Then he began slowly to march up the floor of the car towards me, with his mouth drawn up into a leathery grin of cruelty.

I did his bidding then to save my life. The iron chest rolled out with a dull thud on to the red earth outside, took a slow bound, and landed with a crash amongst bushes.

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"Good," said Quintal. "Now jump down beside it."

I did so, and he followed me. Then he clapped a finger to his mouth and whistled. Presently the fat man appeared on the gangway of the first-class car, and descended by the steps.

"I've told them," said he, grimly, "and I fancy they understand."

"Quite so," said Quintal. "I'll explain to the others. Ho there, Mr. Engineer!"

No reply.

"In the cab, I say! You needn't be frightened. I won't shoot unless you provoke me."

A scared, dirty face appeared through one of the windows of the little iron pent-house. Quintal screwed his pistol muzzle into the back of my head, and continued: "You see my hostage, and how he's fixed. If you or any one in this train makes the least attempt at annoying my pard or me, I'll blow this gentleman's backbone through his teeth. And now I'll trouble you to reverse that engine of yours and back the train a mile down the grade, and stay there for an hour."

I saw the link-motion traverse, and saw the man shove over his starting lever. Then the engine coughed again, and the train slid away from me. All along the cars windows shot up, and savage, insulted faces appeared, and nervous hands which grasped every kind of weapon. A score of muzzles were concentrated on the train

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robbers. They, in their turn, made no counter demonstration against the train. Both their revolvers rested against my head. I shut my eyes and awaited death. It seemed impossible for me that those humiliated passengers, now that their prey was cast loose, could refrain from revenge. No one would blame them heavily if I fell; the country would applaud if the train robbers were killed. Hours seemed to pass. Then a voice spoke up, as it seemed, mistily, and from a great distance.

"All right, Mr. Calvert; it's been a mighty close call for you, but I guess they decided not to see our raise this round."

I opened my eyes and looked wildly down the track. The cow-catcher of the engine was just swaying out of sight round a curve.

Quintal's gaze was following mine. Then he turned sharply round and whistled shrilly.

A moment's pause, and then a return whistle came. Two minutes later and a buckboard came down a rough trail, drawn by two horses, driven furiously. Quintal and the fat man took up the safe and put it over the hind axle.

"Two hundred thousand-dollar greenbacks in that iron box," said Quintal, as he and his partner got on to the middle seat. "More profitable game than quarter-limit poker, I reckon, Mr. Calvert. So long!"

And away went the horses in a big turning circle, and spread out to a gallop in the straight,

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the buckboard (with the safe balanced across its back axle) leaping after them like a spring. The trail twisted and turned amongst the trees, and the buckboard and the robbers were soon out of sight behind the bank of forest. Well, that part of the show was apparently over for good, but it came to my mind that there was still a final act to be played out. So I lit a cigar and sat down beside the track under the shade of a live-oak to wait for the train.

It seemed an intolerable time in coming up. But I heard the engine clanking up the grade at last, and presently it came up level with me, and I jumped on to a tail-board as it lumbered heavily past.

My reception surprised me; practically there was no reception at all. In the Pullman, where I went, the passengers had apparently forgotten the event already. They were sitting about in the seats, listless with the heat, and for the most part reading, or sleeping, or fanning themselves. Only a small group of three, who were lazily talking, troubled to look up when I entered.

"'Say, here's the Englishman," said one. "Had a pleasant entertainment, sir, with your friends in the woods?"

"I'm satisfied with it," I said. "At least I can respect myself now."

The man delivered himself of a tired smile. "Meaning to say we can't. 'Say, are you a shareholder in this road?"

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"No."

"Oh, I thought you might be. You seemed to put such a lot of fuss into looking after the safe."

The man yawned, and settled himself back in his seat for sleep. It was the only comment any one seemed wishful to make on my escapade.

They are a surprising people, the Americans, at times.

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VIII

SHOT

I

THE assemblage drew up in Old Man Davidson's clearing and distributed itself at various points of vantage. The prisoner yawned and sat himself on the stump of a black pine. All hands refreshed themselves with crackers and cheese, and a brand of corn-whisky which burned the throat like fluid lava. The humming-birds left the trumpet vines which sprawled over the posts of the piazza, because the loud chatter frightened them.

By degrees the crackers were done with, and tobacco in its forty different forms imbibed in their place. The meeting rustled and showed itself ripe for business.

The man with the Marlin rifle slipped seven new cartridges into the magazine beneath the barrel, and drew back the low hammer with a suggestive click. Then he laid the weapon tenderly in the crook of his left arm, seated himself on the edge of the piazza, and lifted up his voice in speech: —

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"Boys, if you're all through, we'll form ourselves into a court of inquiry over this matter. Jim, put away the whisky."

Young Davidson walked across to a stump where the demijohn and a glass were standing amid a small swamp of drainings, and carried them away somewhere within the house. It was a simple formality, but the audience felt its weight. Most, unconsciously, straightened themselves for the moment out of their lounge; one man went so far as to comb his hair with his fingers; the prisoner borrowed a wedge of tobacco, stowed it between his molars, and gave an introductory squirt at a black butterfly.

"Now," continued the former speaker, "the thing we've got to do right now before proceeding further is to choose a judge for this court. I move for Old Man Davidson. He was raised on the Tennessee side of the Great Smokies, and most of our crowd here are North Carolina tarheelers. But I don't see that matters. I guess he's good enough for us. Who'll second?"

"I will," said a lean man who sat on the snake-fence. "My bean goes for him all the way."

The prisoner nodded easily. "I reckon Old Man Davidson's as white a man as any here," he remarked.

The other members of the court — the rest of the audience, that is — signified their approval by nods and words. They had most of them

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partaken in the chase, the fight, and the subsequent capture, and naturally they felt the title to a strong voice in the disposing of the prisoner. The trial was a distinctly parochial affair, and on its issue several things depended. All present were interested directly or indirectly in the distilling of corn-whisky, without deference to the Revenue Laws of the United States. For the maintenance of this industry it was necessary that the delinquent within their power should be made into an example and a warning, for the benefit of the faint-hearted and the transgressor.

Every one there knew that the captive was foreordained to death; but now that blood heated by the chase had cooled, every one was anxious that the trial should be conducted with due formality. Judge Lynch, fanatical and cruel though he may be when dealing with the African or his kin, can seldom be accused of unfairness or ferocity when handling his fellow-whites.

Old Man Davidson glanced down at the sling which carried his left arm, and shook an untidy grey head. "No, Steve; no, boys; I guess I'd better not hold the bank this round. Ye see it was the prisoner's gun that pumped lead into this arm of mine, and I wouldn't like it to be said afterwards I'd a finger in hanging a man just because he'd had the drop on me." He turned to the prisoner with an explanatory wave of his sound hand. "Not that I've any down on

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ye for it, Macon County. I guess it was a fair fight right along."

"I guess so," said the prisoner, with a friendly nod. "You parted my ha'r. You shot with the best intentions, Old Man, but you shot high. Still, as you say, p'r'aps it's best for you not to take the chair. It might be uncomfortable for you afterwards in some grocery, and you'd have to draw on strangers. People will talk."

"That's level-headed," said the lean man on the snake-fence, and a hum of approval went all round the ring.

"Say, Steve," suggested Davidson, "why not hitch in yourself?"

The man who was nursing the Marlin nodded gravely. "If you put it that way, I don't see why not. I'm not a tenderfoot. I'm a whisky-miller like the rest of you boys. In knocking about, I've chipped in at this yer sort of party before, and I done seen three men hanged out of a possible four. But don't let me push myself forward, boys."

"Wade in, Steve," said Macon County, encouragingly.

"Prisoner at the bar," said Steve, angrily, "you've no vote here. Hold your blasted tongue."

"It seems kind o' hard, doesn't it," said Macon County, humorously, to the audience in general, "that I can't speak now? It don't take much savvy to see that soon I'll for ever have to hold

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my peace, if Steve doesn't want to lower his record."

Another hum went round the assembly, a mingled buzz of anger and surprise. The man could not have proved more strongly his reckless indifference to what was coming next. The least ridicule or contempt of his court is a misdemeanour which Judge Lynch always deals with fatally.

"See here, Macon County," said Old Man Davidson, with curt emphasis, "we trusted to your word, and so you're not roped up or put to any other inconvenience. But if we have any more of this yer sass, you'll find yourself chawing the toe of my stirrup-iron right away."

Macon County laughed and expectorated, and the trial proceeded.

The accusing evidence was for the most part informal, as the prisoner's crime was too notorious to brook of any contradiction. In fact it consisted merely of a summary from the judge's own lips. He waved a right hand to the mountain side before them, green with unbroken trees to the hot, blue sky-line above. He told how Macon County and another man had there run a blockade still, in a snugly hidden clearing. He spoke of a raid by their common enemy the Revenue, backed by a brace of dare-devil sheriffs, and a cohort of Pinkerton mercenaries. It was all in the ordinary way of business: the salt of their yearly cycle. Macon County happened to be away, peddling the last

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brew of spirit. The other partner, Hamilton, was in residence, entertaining a couple of friends. The inevitable fight went briskly through its appointed course. The raiders advanced pluckily to the storm, but the frame house made a fortress which they could not reduce; and they left their dead, and picked up the back trail.

Hamilton harassed the retreat with a nine-shot repeating twelve bore; received untouched the fire of the surviving sheriff, and then running in, fired buckshot into his heart at pistol range. It was a good fight, a fair fight, and the heavier side was beaten. Hamilton had done well by the mountain community.

The speaker's words came appreciatively, but in a quiet, even voice. The crowd of ragged, armed men scattered about the clearing were respectfully silent. Reassured, the pair of bronze humming-birds had come back to hover over the red flowers of the trumpet vine.

Then came the recapitulation of the crime itself, and Steve's voice rose into angry vehemence. "But what does this yer Macon County do on his return? Boys, he was guilty of the most bloodiest treachery ever told of in these mountains. He came back to the clearin'; and from what we know of Hamilton, we may guess that he was welcomed with outstretched hand. Hamilton would mention how he had saved the still and the rest of the rig — he wasn't a fellow given to boastin', you'll remember — and then

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he'd suggest that the sooner the pair of them pegged out a new claim, the more chance they'd have of continuing business. But d'ye think Macon County'd bear a hand to set the rig on the waggon? Not he. He said he'd weakened on moonlighting; had got religion or something; and told Hamilton that as a murderer he ought to go and give himself up to the sheriff right away. Now, boys, you'll all bear me out, that to say such a thing to a gentleman of Hamilton's opinions was tantamount to asking him to draw on you; and I guess Macon County wasn't much disappointed when Hamilton did it. Macon County here is a fair tough, but Hamilton, when he got roused, was a holy terror; and I allow the way they fit must have been a caution to wild cats."

"I'd 'a' given twenty-five dollars to seen it," murmured the lean man on the snake-fence.

"But this yer fight went on queerly. Neither was knifed, nor gouged, nor lead-poisoned; neither was much the worse 'cept in losing scraps of fur and hide and so on; and Macon County finished out top-side almost as sound as you see him here to-day. 'But,' says you, 'there's nothing wrong in two gentlemen havin' a pleasant set-to of this kind over an argument, so where's the harm done?' Wait a minute, boys. What does this yer Macon County do next? Havin' bunched the sense out of Hamilton by thumping his head with a rock, he next proceeds to rope him up,

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hands and heels, and take him to Ashville in his own waggon. And that's where Block Hamilton is this day, in Ashville Calaboose; and with the evidence they've got against him, he'll be electrocuted as sure as we can't pay for law enough to save his life. Of course there must have been an almighty pile of dollars handed across to Macon County over this job ——"

"Liar!" thundered the prisoner, his olive face flushing pink. "Fellers," he continued, appealing to the audience with outstretched hands, "you've known me for a white man all these years, and you'll not think so mean of me as that. You'll not believe that I gave up Block Hamilton for all the greenbacks betwixt here and ——" His remaining words were drowned. The audience had risen up as one man in noisy clamour to protest against the interruption. The judge on the piazza held Macon County's breast covered with a steady rifle muzzle.

"Gentlemen," said Old Man Davidson, making his voice with difficulty heard above the uproar, "order in court. Order, I say! Order! By gum," he went on to three or four ardent spirits who still persisted in having their say, "if any man of you doesn't drop his voice to a coon's whisper, I'll lay for him myself. Macon County, speak in your turn, and go slow on language, or you shan't be heard at all."

The prisoner had regained his cool indifference. "I've entered my protest, Old Man," he

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remarked; "I guess I shan't want to chip in again."

"We'll waive this question," said the judge, "as I don't see that it matters much, and I'm not here to create any ill-will. There's counts enough without it. Macon County's clearly convicted of the murder of Hamilton — he of course using another man's fingers to do the actual trick — and besides, he's guilty of a much wickeder crime. He's not stood by his pard; he's done the rank opposite. And in rounding on Hamilton, he rounds on us. The lesson Hamilton taught 'em with that repeating shot-gun is all chucked away; no sheriff's posse can ever respect us after this. This is what I call Macon County's biggest crime, and you'll all understand me, though I can't give it a fancy lawyer's name."

"Seems to me," remarked Davidson, thoughtfully, "it foots up to a kinder high-treason, Steve."

"Plum centre," said the judge, with a nod of approval. "Murder and high-treason; and if that doesn't entitle a man to a rope and a tree, damn me if I know what does."

The court hummed acquiescence, and Macon County borrowed another chew of tobacco.

"But before we go any further," continued the judge, "I'd like to ask the prisoner what it was that made him hitch on to this job. Say, is it true that you got religion?"

Macon County expectorated in contempt. "You bet not, Steve."

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"I'm glad of that. But out with it. What was the cause? Give it a name."

"You tire me. What does it matter? But if you do hanker after knowing, why — oh, I took a sudden fancy for the laws of the United States, and thought it a pity they should be trod on. That's it, Steve; note that down. I ran in Block Hamilton because I'm a law-abiding citizen and love the interests of Justice with a big J."

The sarcasm was so outrageous that the humour of it overdid all efforts to keep grave. A ripple of laughter ran round the audience.

"Of course," said the judge, grimly, "if you don't care to let on your real reason, Macon County, you may keep it t'other side of your teeth. You've had your chance of palaver, and now I guess you may as well swing without further waiting. Jim, bring out Poppa's new well-rope."

II

"Hold on!"

The shout came down the rough horse-trail which led into the clearing, and the scattered group of men instinctively slid hands on to their weapons. But the next moment the ready fingers were drawn away, and some of the men smiled. The new comer was a girl of twenty, unattended. She was mounted on a rough, long-tailed colt with a sack by way of saddle. She came into the clearing at a canter, a goodly

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expanse of bare brown ankle showing beneath her skirts. She was bare-headed, ragged, unkempt. Like themselves, she was a tarheeler of the mountains.

"Now, Liza," said the judge, "what do you want? I guess you'd better git. There'll be a man hanged here in less'n three minutes."

"It's about him I comed," said the girl, slipping to the ground and hitching the colt's bridle to the down-hanging branch of a white oak.

"You can't do no good for Macon County now," remarked the lean man on the snake-fence.

"No, Liza," said the prisoner, "you're only interrupting the ceremony. I'd rather you didn't preach the funeral sermon if it's all the same to you. Just quit, there's a good girl, without talk. I guess it's the last thing I'll have to ask you."

The girl advanced stolidly to the middle of the open with set, white face. The chewing-stick at the corner of her mouth dropped to the ground, bitten off close by her clenched teeth. She studiously avoided the prisoner's glance; she took no apparent heed of his words; she kept her great black eyes riveted on the judge.

"Steve, say now, was any evidence heard that 'ud kinder help Macon County?"

"None was wanted."

"Answer me. Was any heard?"

"No."

"Then," said the girl, "you've got to just let this hanging wait, and listen to mine, right now.

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Jim, what's that you've got? Yer Poppa's new well-rope? Then just you tote it back into the house. I reckon it may not be wanted."

She swept the assembly with her glance. "Now, boys, you needn't think I'm here to beg Macon County's life just because I'm fond of him. I'm not. He never had no spare molasses to heave over me. We uster meet 'most once a week, but he'd never nothing more to say than 'Howdy, Liza: clear out and don't come pawin' round me.' No, Macon County kep' all his likings for another woman, and that was Block Hamilton's wife. They was raised together in these mountains, and was sweethearts till she got her fancy for Block and married him in church. Afterwards when Macon County came round to chip in at the moonlighting, there was nothing wrong between her and Macon. I'll take my oath to that. I'd not be standing here if he had ever done any wrong thing by that woman. Why he liked her I can't tell — a mean slip of a split-rail, with her mud-coloured face and her wispy hair. But he did, and many's the time he stood between her and Block's fist."

"Oh, Liza!" the prisoner broke in; "Liza, ye fool, dry up. Why in thunder can't you let that woman alone?"

The girl went on without seeming to notice the interruption. "You know, boys, what kind of a brute Block Hamilton was; but yer none of ye can half understand what a hell he made of

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that woman's life. Macon County knew, though, and was for ever trying to make her run with him. The fool, she'd never go. At last after all these years she went — by herself. Macon follered and found her; wanted to chip in and be her man; but she'd have none of him. 'I'm a lawful married wife and I'll not shame myself,' says she. 'Then I'll make ye a bouncing widow,' says Macon County. At that she gets on her knees and prays him, and prays till he'd promised not to take Block's life with his own fingers in any fashion. She made him swear to this; she told me all about it with her own silly trem'ling lips; and like a fool he swored. But he was a white man, was Macon County; and he saw what was best for her, and he did it, though he knew it would bring him mortal trouble. He knew that woman would never have an unweary hour so long as Block was above the ground; so he set about getting Block planted in the only way he could without breaking his vow. Boys, I guess Macon County's the whitest man in the Carolinas this minute."

She stopped, with her small breasts heaving, and the colour coming and going from her thin face in waves.

"Is that all you have to say, Liza?"

"I reckon."

"Then as this court has heard your evidence, you may as well go whilst we decide upon it. Yer Poppa'll take you."

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The lean man from the snake-fence came up and hooked his fingers into the girl's arm, leading her towards where the horse-trail cut into the trees.

As she was passing the prisoner, he reached out his hands and drew her to him.

"You are a good little soul, Liza," he began, but there she stopped his utterance by a shower of mad, wild kisses; "a good little soul. And you've done all any one could do. But I wish you hadn't come. So long."

Father and daughter went away down the muddy trail, and the elders of the court drew their heads together in earnest conversation. A turkey buzzard, on patrol above, circled nearer to the clearing, and signalled to other carrion fowl from the more distant beats of the sky. After a while the men separated to their places again, and chewed stolidly. The judge delivered the reconsidered sentence.

"Macon County," said he, "Liza has told a lot of things which weigh a deal in your favour. You are just as guilty of high treason against us whisky-millers as ever you were. But as regards Hamilton, you aren't near so black as you was painted before. We wanted to commute your sentence, and you may thank Old Man Davidson for suggesting how it could be done. You've got to be made an example of, d'ye see, or else the rest of us would never know what it was to sleep safe. But you shan't be hanged. You

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shall be shot, like a gentleman, and you can choose who you'd like to drop you."

The prisoner's face brightened up. "Now," said he, "that's mighty kind of you, Steve. Mighty kind and thoughtful of you, Old Man, and boys all. As you give me the choice, I'll pay Steve the compliment of being the cleanest shot in this crowd. Steve, I'll trouble you."

The judge lifted his Marlin rifle and cuddled the stock with his cheek. The prisoner took a pace forward to receive his fire. Encouraged by the silence, the bronze humming-birds whirred down again to sip sweets from the red flowers of the trumpet vine.

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IX

THE CONSUMPTIVE

"THE grisly part of it is," said Tennant, "that if I go away from Grand Canary here, I shall forthwith die. Whereas if I could manage to stay in the island, I could hang on with life for another five months and a bit, and my esteemed cousin must certainly crumple up with his Bright's disease before that time and hand me on the title and the estates. You can calculate out these things to such definite dates. That's the beauty of modern medical science when it begins to interest itself in diseases, even if it can't cure them." He broke off and coughed for a couple of minutes, and then gasped, "Especially consumption. By Jove! isn't that greeny-blue on the sea splendid?"

Addingham, the other man, shivered. "I say, you are gruesome," he complained.

"What," said Tennant, with a wry smile, "do you grudge me a sight of colour on the sea-water now? No, I know what you mean, old man, and I'm sorry; but you must bear with me a bit. We consumptives have such a way of talking about our blessed health, and dreaming about it,

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and counting up the exact number of days we've got to live, and swapping views on vintages of cod-liver oil, that we forget that all these details are a bit noisome to outsiders."

"Oh, it's not that," said Addingham, rather feebly.

"Yes, but it is, and I'm going to make things worse by keeping on with the same tale. Here are the Americans on the point of declaring war with Spain; and when they actually do, Las Palmas won't be a safe place for an Englishman to live in."

"I suppose it won't be for you."

"Especially for me, as you say. If a man will be fool enough to interfere in the national amusement of beating a mule to death, he must expect to be locally unpopular."

"You hit that *tartana* driver across the face, remember, with your stick."

"Because I was too limp and feeble to do more. My dear boy, I'd cheerfully have cut him to ribbons if I'd been equal to the exertion. You see, I'd been looking on at the process of torturing that mule for some time, and was naturally feeling rather sick and very wrathful. I suppose from the driver's point of view it's equally natural that he and his friends should have done their best to knife me at intervals ever since."

Addingham rubbed his chin. "It's awkward," he said — "very. These Canarios are the tamest of people generally, but since this war trouble's

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been on they've developed a fine patriotism, and grown very excited over it. I don't suppose many Americans find their way as far out as this, and so, as an Englishman talks the same language, they make him do instead. In fact, to tell the truth, I was mobbed near the cathedral to-day, and had a howling escort of them to see me home right out here to the hotel."

"I wish the Yankees were at the devil!" said Tennant, irritably. "Or rather, I wish they'd 'suspend hostilities' till I get through my five and a half months here below, and then come down like the Assyrians and sweep the place clear."

"And I wish you wouldn't talk of your horrible five and a half months," said Addingham, waking up to a memory that it is always a sound man's duty to hearten the sick. "You are looking a sight better than you did a week ago. You'll pull round again all right with a bit more rest."

"My dear boy," said Tennant, "don't pit your puny opinion against science. My local pill-mixer here has done nothing but handle consumptives for the past ten years. He gets hold of his patient on landing, sounds him, tries his wind, counts his teeth, puts the result on paper, and multiplies by ten. Three days later he takes a second observation to check the first, and then he tells your friends the exact number of weeks, days, and hours you've got to live. If they're new to

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Grand Canary, the friends bet he's wrong, and lose their money. He tells you, of course, as all doctors are forced to by their initiation oath, or whatever it is, that there's not much the matter, and you'll probably live for ever; but you can worm the truth out of servants for a tip; and that's the way you get hold of the expert opinion that you've paid the doctor to give."

Addingham was going to speak, but the sick man put his thin brown bird's claw of a hand on his wrist, and stopped him. "Just let me have my way," he said, "without more argument. You know I'm right, and I know you know, and so let's chuck conventionality. I've stared at death too long, and guessed at what's behind too much, to have any room for further emotions on the matter. But you can do me a very real service if you'll put me in the way of not being robbed of my appointed span. I'm always very sick at sea, and if I go away from here to Madeira or any of those places, I shall certainly shake myself to bits on the road, and die before I get there. If I do that, my venerable cousin will outlive me, and my will may be counted as waste paper, and I shall die writhing. But if you can think of a way to let me dangle on to the end of my allotted tether, his Bright's disease must collar him for a certainty within this next week or so, and then . . . well, I shall inherit, and can dispose of the cash as I please. But honestly, the only way I can think of is by grabbing the fort on the hill

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behind there from the local army, and holding it till we're through. Otherwise an enthusiastic mob will scrag me to a certainty the day war breaks out."

"You've left the money to that girl, I suppose?"

"Of course."

"Even after she wouldn't marry you?"

"My dear boy, the boot was on the other leg. I wouldn't marry her. I got to know from a doctor at home that I was lungy, and I wasn't going to be brute enough to marry a girl with that hanging over me."

"So you went and deliberately ——"

The sick man snapped out "Shut up," and flushed scarlet. "Well, I suppose I'd better own up," he said a minute later, "as it's only to you. But a man has to do something if he wants to break off an engagement with a girl who's very fond of him, and I couldn't think of any better way than getting into a mess with another woman who . . . Oh, you know the whole dirty tale. I hadn't the brains to invent a cleverer way. Working up that mean, paltry, cold-blooded scandal was the only thing that occurred to me. I'm a bit of a thick-head."

Addingham stretched out and gripped his hand rather shamefacedly for a second, and then turned away. "You're a decent sort, you know," he said.

"Oh, drop that," said Tennant, fretfully. "Use your head and get me out of this mess. Can't you remember that she's as poor as a rat, and will

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have to remain poor, or dress on the doles that some rich husband pinches out to her, unless you manage to think of a way to make me outlive that ancient wreck of a cousin of mine?"

"Well," said Addingham, "it seems to resolve itself into this: War is going to be declared between America and Spain, whether you like it or not; Spain knows that she will be badly licked, and Spaniards are mad accordingly; the local Spaniard hates you personally, and will find an opportunity to scupper you as soon as war starts; and so Las Palmas district ceases to be healthy for you from now on. You say that it would be fatal for you to leave the island just now; so it seems to me that the only alternative is to go and live *en perdu* up amongst the hills of the interior."

"By Jove! that's just the very notion. Only, how am I — alone, I mean — to ——"

"Oh, if I hadn't intended to come along too and nursery-maid you," said Addingham, brusquely, "I should never have suggested such a mad picnic. Well, as this sort of idea seems to chime in with your notions, I'll just be off one-time (as those West African fellows say) and make some preparations. We shall have to take grub and clothes and things, and a transport system's got to be arranged for by which our retreat can't be traced. It would never do to let the general public know which way we might be found, or we'd have your mule-beating friend and his cronies round with their knives before the week was out."

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Now, Addingham was a man who knew Grand Canary thoroughly. He had visited it for the first time eight years before, and, as was customary, the charm of the island grew upon him, and he had returned to it again at least once every year since. He knew every peak and every cinder slide; he had explored every one of the great *barrancos;* he knew personally every vineyard, every tomato garden, and every banana farm in the circle of the island; and, finally, he probably knew more about the Guanche caves than any Englishman living. He had visited all the mummy caves, the store caves, and the living caves of that dead race which were already known to exist, and during his ramblings amongst the lava cliffs and the dry, crumbling hills he had found others whose existence he kept to himself, lest vandal tourists, and more vandal museum collectors, might desecrate those few remaining signatures of the past. He had grown to have a feeling akin to comradeship for those long-forgotten dead, and on the rare occasions when he thought about the matter in such an aspect, he congratulated himself that at least he had never done anything to rip more of the cloak from their decent past for the vulgar stares of the ten days' tourist.

Incidentally, in wandering about the island, Addingham had learned the Canary *patois* of Spanish, the intricacies of local paths and transport, and a list of the needs for a residence in the high-

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lands of the interior; and so, on the day after the subject was broached between them, he was able to get Tennant away from the hotel, and through Las Palmas, and out past Monte and Santa Brigida, without his journey being in any way noticed.

It is forbidden by doctor's law for consumptives to be exposed to the air of evening, and so that night they stayed under a roof, and Tennant coughed in a tempered atmosphere; but next morning, when the sun had made the air benign, they left their carriage and set off again, this time with one pack-mule and another for riding, and left the road finally behind them. They were none too soon either. War had been declared the previous night; and though Madrid, and even Spain itself, might be calm and unemotional, the towns and villages of Grand Canary were in a seethe of patriotic ferment. Even the locally-known Addingham would have been in considerable personal danger, and as for the unpopular Tennant, with his foreign prejudices against beating a mere worn-out mule to death, his life would not have been worth ten minutes' purchase.

The way they traversed I also have trod; but as I am under pledge of secrecy, it will not be described here. Indeed, without a map, it would be hard to direct a traveller so that he might refind it. There are so many stony *barrancos*, leading to so many barren valleys, in the interior of

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the isle of Grand Canary ; and each one at times has the same semi-tropical sun blazing with genial warmth overhead, and the same euphorbia bushes growing from the austere cinders underfoot, and the same dwelling caves, and store caves, and mummy caves of those long-dead Guanches discreetly screened behind ingenious rocks.

They journeyed on and on, up and down and up, till the weak sick man on the jolting mule was nearly at the end of his meagre strength, game though he might be in uncomplaining endurance ; and then the two beasts were hobbled in a tiny dell of coarse grasses (where moisture accumulated from the slope above), and there remained before the men a climb too steep even for a Spanish mule. The Guanche of those dead old years had his enemies, and so he delved his house at some spot where he would have full advertisement of an enemy's approach.

Addingham clapped a sturdy arm round Tennant's waist, and half-dragged, half-carried him up the inclines ; and Tennant, with vicious energy, thrust out the last embers of his strength to help. "You're sweating like a pig," he gasped, as they grappled their way up the rocks, "and so am I. By the Lord, it's fine to do a climb, just once again."

"You stay here and get back your wind," said Addingham, when at last they scrambled through the hole which made the entrance, and sprawled

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on the floor of the cave. "I'll go down and bring up the furniture and the grub to fit out this desirable residence."

It took him four journeys to bring the contents of the mule's pack up the rocks, and when the work was finished night had fallen, and Tennant was sleeping a calm sleep of exhaustion. The mountain air was cool and sweet and fresh, and slightly tinged with salt from the South-East Trade; a great globe of moon hung above their valley, lighting the lava cliffs and the harsh cinders in stern black and white; and behind him, in the ramifications of the cave, Addingham fancied he could hear the ghosts of goatskin-clad mummies, passing the news in whispers concerning these strange men of non-Guanche race who had arrived out of space to visit them.

"Men have been born in these caves," Addingham mused, "and have lived here all their days, and have died here, and have been buried in the caves beyond, where their dust and parchment still remain; and presently I suppose another man will die where those others have died before him. For me it will be to look on, and watch helplessly whilst he coughs himself into the next world. We're friends, I know, and I suppose it's my duty to stay on and watch, and help, but ——" He broke off in his definite musing, and shuddered at a vague horror of thought. The caves and the valley were lonely beyond words, and the idea of his isolation, and of the man dying

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by inches close by, shook him and unstrung his nerves. "I suppose it was a foolish thing to do after what poor old Tennant told me, and after what he's done himself, but I'm glad I wrote that letter to the girl. Bah! what a miserable coward a man can be when he's got a bad sickness to nurse!"

Addingham woke with the first of the dawn, and saw that the sick man was still warm and sleeping. He lit a candle, and rambled away into the dark of the caves, returning presently with a stone measure full of grain and a primitive quern, also of stone. He toasted the grain, pinch by pinch, over a spirit stove, and then, after sprinkling it with salt, ground it in the quern. Then he kneaded it with water into a dough, and prepared to make his breakfast.

Tennant woke and saw him. "What's that stuff you've got there?" he asked.

"*Gofio*. All the country people in the Canaries eat it, and for a change I like it myself."

"I didn't know you'd brought up any corn with you on the mule."

"I didn't. This was stored up by the last tenant of these caves a thousand years ago, in a stone rat-proof chest, which I'll show you directly if you like. The original storer doesn't want it now, and as the stuff's as good to-day as it was the hour it was put there, I'm robbing him. I didn't expect you were going to wake yet. However, I'll set to and make your breakfast

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now. Have a nip of cod-liver oil just as an appetiser?"

"Hang the cod-liver oil! Give me some of that *gofio* stuff."

Addingham looked doubtful. "It's hardly grub a man would care for if he feels a bit chippy."

"Respect an invalid's whims," said Tennant, sitting up and stretching out a hand. "Surrender your breakfast, my dear boy, and make yourself some more. I'm as hungry as a wolf. No, hang coffee too. If we're going to play at being Guanches, let's do the thing thoroughly and drink water. It won't be typhoidy up here."

He ate his meal with appetite. "I don't wonder at this *gofio* being the principal food that's eaten in the Canaries without break for Lord knows how many thousand years. It's fine; especially if you're hungry. I say, Mr. Caterer, you've a small notion of one's capacity. Look here, show me how, and let me help cook some more. I'm feeling frightfully energetic just now."

Now, it is no place here to give a diary of the existence of those two men, the sick and the sound, in those Guanche caves in the centre of the isle of Grand Canary. They lived on the stores they had brought up; on banana bunches and other fruits, which Addingham raided under cover of night from plantations on the lower ground; on occasional chickens, which probably

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came from the same source; and especially on the hoard of grain stored up by that forgotten savage in the rat-proof coffer in one of the inner caves. Some days Tennant was worse, and counted up with calm cynicism the inroads which were being made into his allotted five months and a half; and some days he was better, and talked of swindling the doctors and upsetting current wages. And as time went on the percentage of the hopeful days increased, as Addingham's strained mind was quick to notice.

Of the Spanish-American war and its defeats and successes they heard no word; but from one sign and another Addingham learned that the Canarios were still excited, and that they must continue to live *en Guanche* if Tennant was to be safe from the knife of the injured *tartana* driver. Addingham had also another thing which weighed on his mind, and that was the letter he had written on the day of their flight from Las Palmas. Until it could reach England, and be answered in person, he was merely troubled in spirit and took no other move; but when that time had elapsed, he made his nightly raids the excuse for calling at a rendezvous which he had named in the letter, but every night found it cold and unvisited.

The weeks grew on into a month, the month into several months, and still there was no news at the rendezvous. Tennant was quite confident now of outliving his cousin with the Bright's

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disease, and at times suggested that he would "have to be shot when his date arrived, so as to keep up the doctor's reputation for accuracy." He developed a large interest in the bygone Guanche race and their doings, and ate *gofio* made from prehistoric wheat with an appetite that was frequently wolfish. Day by day Addingham watched him with wonderment and growing satisfaction.

But at last there came the event which Addingham had now begun to dread. He went out one midnight as usual to the rendezvous, and from that moment Tennant did not see him at the Guanche cave again. Instead, there came with the first rays of morning a woman, who crawled in through the tiny entrance-way of the cave, and threw herself upon him, and woke him with her kisses.

He got up, kissed her once, and then thrust her from him. "Oh, go," he said, "go. It's hard enough to die without having you here. That brute Addingham must have written to you. I'll never forgive him for this."

"I was travelling in India," she said, "and his letter followed after me. That is why I was so long in coming to you, my dear. What a fool I was not to see through your dear old stupid ruse before!"

Tennant gave a whimsical laugh. "That scandal with — er — that other woman? Oh, I chucked you and cared for her just then. I'm very changeable."

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She lifted his arms and tucked them round her neck and looked him in the eyes. "Are you?" said she. "You don't seem to have changed your way of looking at me."

"'Man can't help his unfortunate personal appearance." He took his arms resolutely from her neck, and deliberately moved away from her to the opposite side of the cave. "Mary," he said, "I found out I was in a galloping consumption, and as I knew you'd have some silly notion that you ought to stick to me, I just used my brilliant head to invent a definite order for you to clear out. It was luck on Mrs. — er — the other woman, of course; but she doesn't deserve much consideration anyway."

"My darling," she said, "I would rather be your widow than the wife of any other man in all the world. But I am going to be your wife, and remain your wife. You are not going to die. Addingham told me you had been very ill, but he said you were marvellously better. He said it was the mountain air or something, and that he was convinced that the consumption had stopped. My sweetheart, you shall not die. Listen to me; I tell you you shall not. You shall live on. I must have you."

Some one from outside the cave whistled cheerfully, and the noise came of shoes slipping over rock, and the panting of a man's breath. Presently the man himself crawled in through

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the narrow opening, and sat puffing and mopping his forehead on the floor.

"Hullo, Doc.," said Tennant, "didn't expect a visit from you this morning. Have the Americans taken the island, and have they tariffed you out of your practice?"

"The Americans are all right at their own fireside, writing puffs of themselves in the newspapers, and the island's simmered down into its usual doze again. I say, you're a pretty sort of fraud, making me out a liar like this! Here, let me look at you and see how that lung's going on."

The girl watched, holding her breath. The doctor went through his examination with careful system. "Well," she whispered when he had finished, "is it consumption?"

"It's a marvel. He was as clear a case of phthisis as ever I saw when he landed, and between ourselves I didn't give him long to live, though of course I didn't breathe a word of that to anybody."

"Yes, you did," said Tennant, with a grim chuckle; "you said five months and eighteen days was the exact length of my tether."

"I said nothing of the kind: it would have been most unprofessional. The beggars invented it. But anyway, young man, your disease is stopped, and you can make the most of that. How it's been done, the Lord above knows best. It may be the air up here, or the water, or

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some hidden virtue in the cave, or that diet of mummy-wheat *gofio* which Addingham tells me you're so keen on. I don't know which it is. I wish I did. If I'd the ghost of a notion, I'd write a letter about you to the *Lancet*, and claim to have found a new consumption cure, and become famous."

"Then do you warrant me sound?" asked Tennant, with almost a tremble in his voice.

"You're marvellously, yes, miraculously better than you were when I saw you last, but you'll do with a bit more coddling before you leave the island, and after that you can go home, and know yourself to be as sound a man as there is in England."

"Am I to go down to Las Palmas again, then?"

"We-ll, I don't personally admire your carriage entrance here — in fact, I'm not built for these sort of gymnastics; but as the neighbourhood seems to suit you so finely, I'd stay on a bit longer if I were you and complete the cure. Of course, you've lost your mate, I know. He told me just now he daren't come back, because he was afraid you'd shoot him on sight for what he'd done."

"I fancy I'd let him off."

"I think he could be replaced," said the girl, with a blush. "The guide-book said there was an English chaplain on the island."

"Of course there is," said the doctor, still

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mopping with his handkerchief. "'Think we're heathens and savages? My dear, you shall come home again with me to-night, and to-morrow we'll bring up the *padre* and fix you up nice and tight." He nodded to Tennant. "My man, you needn't look scared. I know what you think, and I know what's right. I'll take the responsibility for this, and I don't make a mistake a second time. But there's one thing I want to impress upon you. When you do set up your new *ménage* up here, buy your bananas and chickens openly, and pay for them in hard *pesetas*. They say there's a chicken thief somewhere in this neighbourhood, and the farmers are beginning to lay traps for him."

"I've done with disreputableness," said Tennant, gaily. "We'll be the most respectable pair of cave dwellers in Grand Canary. By the way, Mary, I'm a bit behindhand with news, but — er — are you going to be a countess to-morrow?"

"A countess? I don't understand. Oh, yes, I see what you mean." And she laughed. "No, the doctors made another mistake there, and that cousin of yours hasn't got Bright's disease at all. He'll probably live on for years, and you're as poor as a rat, dear. If you hadn't been," said she, cocking her chin at him, "I shouldn't have been brazen enough to come here for you."

"'Don't believe you," said Tennant, cheerfully. "I say, old lady, what frauds these doctors are!"

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"I haven't made a mistake about you this second time, anyway," said the Las Palmas doctor, as he fanned himself with his hat. "I can tell you I look upon you with remarkable pride and gratification. Why, man, think what an advertisement you'll be for Grand Canary! In a month's time you'll be having a syndicate coming to the cave here, asking what your terms are for an exhibition as Strong Man in the London music halls."

"All right," said Tennant; "anything, so long as you've brought me to life again."

The girl linked her fingers over his arm, and looked up wistfully into his worn face, and murmured, "Life! Isn't it wonderful, wonderful?"

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X

THE PLACE OF THE SACRED BO-TREE

PLEASE you to mount the carpet and travel backwards through a matter of two thousand years. It is our will that you land upon the Dagoba of Thuparamaya, the relic-shrine built by a devout king in his city of Anuradhapura to contain the collar-bone of Buddha.

Behold the city spread beneath you — a great place of palaces and temples, of red-brick houses of the wealthy set amid fruit gardens, of squares bedecked with elephants and bulls in stone, of wide long streets lined with the bazaars, of narrow alleys squalid with Eastern garbage and naked children. Behold this city — fifty-two miles around its ring, sixteen miles across from gate to gate. Remember that mushroom London has yet to crawl forth from the forests and swamps which flank the Thames; and that amongst the hills where Edinburgh is to arise, a prowling savage hunts the beasts with a stone-shod mace. Realise that you are gazing down upon Anuradhapura of Ceylon in the height of its fame, and with the mists of twenty centuries brushed away.

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The air is clear as nothingness, rich bright blue overhead, and the colours which paint the city come to you vivid and undiminished. You glance over the whole wide ring of the boundary walls, and remember that within them are penned three millions of human beings. You see them on the housetops, in the gardens, in the streets, and you hear the hum of them from the doorways and through the shuttered windows. The streets squirm like tortured snakes amongst the houses, divorced as far as may be from any cramped rectangular plan; the houses are built with infinite variety of form and colour; the dust rises in faint brown clouds from the feet of the traffic.

It is a city of processions, and every street has its cavalcade. A lady of the harem rides by in her shuttered palanquin, and the bearer-coolies shout to clear the crowd. A pearl-captain with a little leathern pouch follows, surrounded by his crew well armed, carrying the spoils of a year to the merchant who employs him. A religious procession of a thousand pilgrims and a score of ochre-robed priests treads on their heels. Then come more coolies with bales of silks from India-across-the-water, and bronze sword-blades, and wood for the lance-shaft sellers in the bazaar. The striped awnings above reach half-way across the street, and under them the hard red brick of the houses gives out the heat soaked in through many centuries. But the units of the great city never rest. They are no worn-out race of Ori-

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entals. They are a people in their prime — they are full of a huckstering feverish energy.

In the main street of the city, a gorgeous thoroughfare of ten thousand houses, a little storm arises. A naked thief has pilfered from one of the merchant's stores displayed under a cavernous archway. A servant runs out to seize him, and the fellow struggles. Blood is shed. A guard of armed men presses up through the gathering crowds — clanking, stalwart, upright. They seize the thief, words are spoken, and the thief ceases to exist as an entire man. Then they take money from the merchant and depart to the place from which they came, leaving behind them a battered corpse in the roadway. The gaunt dogs are already beginning to arrive from down the alleys, and the carrion fowl collect above the housetops. It is an incident not uncommon. There are three millions of people in the city, and order must be kept.

A swarthy, reckless-looking fellow rolls up the street, kicks one of the pariah dogs out of his way, and proceeds to do business with the merchant who has just been despoiled. He wears a purple rag round his neck, battered armour on his trunk, and a broad axe slung by a thong to his wrist. He has got so thoroughly used to danger of every conceivable sort that ten minutes of assured safety would unnerve him. He is mariner, peddler, pirate — the last always when occasion serves. His home is in the distant sea-port of

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Tyre, in the little-known northern sea. He has brought with him a tiny cargo of dye-stuffs for disposal, and habit makes him plant his back against the wall and grip the axe-handle as he barters.

Another religious procession with densely filled ranks surges by and blots the Tyrian and the merchant from view. This one goes to a temple, and the yellow-clad priests chant, and butterflies flicker in the gloom before the image of the god. Buddha is great, and his worshippers devout. Throughout all the days of the year and through all the nights they cease not in their prayers and praises. The rest of the city may sleep, but not the priests. When one tires, another takes his place; and when one dies, a novice joins the priesthood. The man who scoffs at religion is a man yet to be born long centuries hence.

But the people are not without their lighter moments. In the squares and in the public gardens are platforms on which men and women dance and posture, and trained animals show their tricks, and jugglers make a mango tree grow out of a seed, or throw a rope into the air and climb up it and disappear into nothingness. There are feastings too, and races, fights with the knuckle-duster and tricks on the balanced pole; and those who come to watch, and those who stay to feast, pay in kind or coin according to what they get and according to their means.

There are baths, too, which are places for

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luxury and rest. They are placed in every ward of the city and are built for every caste and grade. There are baths built of marble and baths of homely granite. There are private baths in the houses of the king's brothers of burnished gold and ivory.

And over all, the soldiery of the king keep guard and order.

The king! Yes, a real king; a monarch such as has ceased to exist for many a weary century, and who lives in a palace appropriate to his state. You that stand on the high dome of the Dagoba of Thuparamaya, behold! This royal dwelling is built in a square, with sides 230 feet in length, and the uppermost storey is the ninth above the ground. On every floor there are a hundred rooms, and in every room four windows filled in with gilded trellis. Above all is a thing which one believed to exist only in the *Arabian Nights Entertainment* — a roof of polished brass. See the winking splendour of it under the blaze of sky, and guess at a millionth of the things that have passed beneath its shelter!

There is a procession of howdahed elephants coming up this moment — huge fellows without tusks, who plod on entirely careless of the crowds which scuttle from their path. A glittering squadron of cavalry attends them, and the banners tell that the pageant is made to escort in a visiting king from his halting-place without the city walls. The great bronze doors open, and he

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passes into the palace, and the doors clash behind him as they have closed on the heels of mightier than he. Hiram of Tyre (in earlier days) has sent an embassy to that palace, and with him was a hook-nosed man who took back word to Jerusalem of "apes and peacocks," and excited a new avarice in *blasé* Solomon.

Dynasties might change — had changed — but that palace with its glitter of roof was destined to endure down eight centuries, and to house a king who was a real king. It was always the king who did everything, whose will was the people's law. One king built palaces, another bazaars; one spent his life in war, and another in breeding peacocks. King Prakrama it was who, for the better water-supply of his country, caused 1470 tanks to be constructed, which were to be known as the "seas of Prakrama" all down through the ages. But Oevenipiatissa the King (of 307 B.C.) was the most renowned of all, for he it was who set up the cult of Buddha, as the national worship, and who planted the sacred Bo-tree (in 288 B.C.).

The tree was started as a trivial budding slip. They brought it to him from far without his city of Anuradhapura, in a great procession which gathered pomp and numbers as it advanced. It was a cutting from the tree under which Gautama had become Buddha — a thing of indescribable holiness — a gift more precious than all the king's possessions. He honoured it

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fittingly. He built a temple of red brick for its attendant priests, and in the walled courtyard of the temple, on a triple platform of cunning architecture, they planted the little switch of wood.

The tree grew, looking like a banyan with branches which did not root, and it put forth heart-shaped leaves with long, attenuated points. The folk from India-across-the-water who came to do pilgrimage there called it Pipal; but the men who came in later years, after the manner of their islands, called the tree a sacred fig, or, when they wanted to be pedantic, wrote it as *Ficus religiosa.*

* * * * *

And now, you who read this, step from the carpet which has held you back fifteen centuries in the past, and look at Anuradhapura as it is in the current year of grace. You will see some evidences of those old scenes still around you; and for the rest you must wade through the "Mahâwansa," which is a metrical "Baedeker" written in the Pali tongue.

The city has fallen upon evil times, and the decay of age has gripped all her bones. The king and his three millions of subjects are not, and the fierce-growing Singhalese flora has invaded even the sanctity of the temples. The great houses and bazaars are mouldering rubbish-heaps. The stone bulls and elephants peer from amid scrub that is hung with orchids. The king's palace itself shows only a bristling forest of six-

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teen hundred granite columns sprouting out from a wilderness of rubble. Of the great brass roof, who shall say into what melting-pots the plates of that have found a way?

The forest is the chief holder of the city now. Trees girdle the fallen images, and smother from sight the domes of the huge relic-shrines. Shrubs have levered down a milliard milliard bricks; rank jungle-plants have burst up the tooled stone causeways. But man has never lost entire touch with the place, and to-day he is regaining possession. A squalid native village has always huddled amid the centre of the ruins, and this is now beginning to glow with a newer life. The agents of the Crown Colony of Ceylon have it in hand. The great tank of Kalawewa, which for centuries had been a ruin, was in 1888 repaired after years of labour, and once more Anuradhapura has water flowing through her ducts. There is a Government rest-house, a British magistrate to punish the evil-doer, and police to spread the law of the land. On clear nights one can hear the scream of the locomotive whistle from the terminus at Matale. The age is utilitarian. Even dead Pharaoh is hustled from his grave to become a spectacle.

But one thing in Anuradhapura has not changed through all the weariness of time, and has not bent to heathen conqueror or bowed to that greater Vandal, the civilisation of the West. The temple of the sacred Bo-tree still remains, an

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oasis tilled by religion. The brick of the court-yard walls maintains its blush; the priests are in the same ochre-coloured robes; the tree bears leaves to a line the same as those it bore when King Oevenipiatissa sat on his throne of gold and ivory and precious gems. The peacocks are there too, as they always have been, to lend colour to the place with their living jewellery.

Only once in all its life of over two thousand years have the newer gods frowned on the tree, and that was in the October of 1887. Then it was that they sent a great storm and splintered off the main stem and threw it to the litter of the courtyard. The yellow-clothed priests with sorrow took the wood and cremated it with vast and mournful ceremony, and the cult of the surviving branches continues.

The tree now is hoary with years, and rests feebly on its crutched sticks, and is bound about the middle with many a girdle; but its heart-shaped leaves are as fresh as those it bore in that far mysterious past, and never for an instant do they rest. Unceasingly they circle and dance and quiver before the little monkeys on the wall, and the yellow-robed priests of the temple, and the tired pilgrims who do obeisance in the courtyard. They are never cut, never shaken; but when they fall to the ground, then the devout take them as holy relics, and give what is due to the priests of the temple.

This is the year of our Lord 1895, and the

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Buddhist pilgrims have done reverence to every leaf which has fallen from that tree since 288 years before His birth. We know that the heathen is an erring man who bows down to wood and stone, but we do not always realise that his constancy is a thing we cannot match.

Two thousand one hundred and eighty-three years — one tree — one religion: think the matter out. It may bring understanding to other things which lie within that smiling, haggard, mysterious East.

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XI

THE MUMMY OF THOMPSON-PRATT

GARGRAVE was a fellow of Clare with rooms in College, who lectured twice a week on Constructive Egyptology, as a rule to empty benches. He was one of the most profound Egyptologists of the day, and had a clever knack of keeping all interesting items to himself, and discoursing the dry bran of theory only. At the beginning of each October term he had quite a crowd to hear him. The undergraduate who thought he ought to do something up at Cambridge on which to report progress to parent or guardian, would run his eye down the list, and pitch upon Constructive Egyptology as a subject likely to be of the light fiction order, and one which would probably offer him pleasant entertainment. But one hearing of Gargrave soon knocked this notion on the head, and that undergraduate in future wasted no more time drawing caricatures on lecture-room foolscap with spluttering lecture-room quills, whilst Gargrave prosed about the true significance of an accidental scratch on a scarabeus, but spent his mornings in bed, or on the river, or merely playing poker, as Nature had originally intended. And the lecture-room

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benches remained vacant till the next batch of green freshmen arrived in the succeeding October.

This result was pointed out clearly to Gargrave by candid friends. But this made no difference in the discourses. He held to the solid Cambridge theory that 'Varsity lectures were not intended to amuse, or teach anything that was useful; but merely to educate; which was a very different matter. "D'ye think I'm a music hall?" Gargrave would say. "Or is it a damned board-school you take me for?" The rest of the Clare fellows wished Gargrave would take orders, and then they could give him a college living and get rid of him. But Gargrave refused to do this thing, on the plea of religious scruples; and rumour got about in Cambridge that his creed was that of the ancient gods of Egypt.

Of the same college, and the bye-term senior to Gargrave, was Thompson-Pratt, Demonstrator in Chemistry at the Cavendish laboratories. He was not a Fellow of Clare, or even likely to be made one. Why he had ever got a first class in the National Science tripos was an abstruse mystery. He was not a man of brilliant intellect, nor did he, in his undergraduate days, ever resort to excessive reading. When he graduated at the end of his third year, he tried school-mastering for a twelve-month, disliked it, and stumbled into this demonstratorship in chemistry which was then vacant. Envious people said he got it

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by sheer favouritism. He himself suggested that it was a just reward for his powers of blarney.

Thompson-Pratt always had matches and strong tobacco ready in his pocket for any one who needed them, and in the waiting spaces during a lingering experiment he could re-spin a yarn from back numbers of the *Pink 'Un* as deftly as one could wish to hear it. He was a distinctly popular man in a small way, and got asked out more than was good for his health.

Gargrave dined daily at the high table in hall, drank two glasses of port and ate four walnuts in the Combination Room afterwards, and then returned to his own rooms on the Don's staircase and worked till 2 A.M. Thompson-Pratt kept in Green Street, dined at the Hoop, and spent his evenings at threepenny-rise poker with four other Bachelors who entertained one another in turn and sat up till daylight. He knew Gargrave and disliked him candidly, and Gargrave despised Thompson-Pratt. So here are the men, and these are the relations between them.

Gargrave brought home the mummy himself by long sea from Alexandria in a P. & O. boat, and as I happened to be on board, and was a man of his own year and college, he looked upon me as his especial prey and bored me accordingly. I told him at the outset that except as fuel I was not interested in mummies in any degree whatever. But that did not choke him off in the least; and he poured con-

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versational mummy-dust into my ears all down the Mediterranean, and through the Straits, and across the Bay, and down Channel till we fetched up in Southampton. I gave him the slip there in the Custom-House, and hoped he'd get run over by a cab in the street.

Two years later I went up to Cambridge to take my M.A. degree. I was paying my fees in the butteries, when in came Gargrave and passed the time of day. "Look here," he said, "I wish you'd come round to my rooms after you've finished your business in the Senate House. I've got an experiment I want you to be in at."

"What sort of experiment?" I asked. "Not mummies?"

"It has to do with a mummy. The one you saw me bring home from Egypt."

"No, thanks, old man," I said. "I hate the whole breed of them. Besides, I've another engagement."

He pawed my coat sleeve. "I know you hate them. That's just the very reason I want you. You'll be an unprejudiced witness. Now do stay. You needn't put up at the Bull. I've got a spare bed, and I'll tell my gyp to make it up for you. I believe I've got hold of the finest thing that was ever hit upon since Egyptology started, and I want you to be there to confirm my notes."

"But I should be no good at taking down

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notes. I'm merely a novelist. I haven't climbed as far as being a reporter yet. Shorthand is clean beyond me."

"I've got a phonograph to take it all down," he said. "Writing would be no use even though you knew the language, which you don't. The accent we use now is probably quite wrong. You wouldn't be able to catch hold of one word in ten."

"I wish you wouldn't talk hieroglyphics."

"I can't explain it more to you here," he said. "You must come and see for yourself, and I can promise you the entertainment will be exciting enough and suit even your lively tastes. If you stay away, you'll regret it all the rest of your life."

"Why?"

He was getting exasperated. "You'll see why, you fool, when my book comes out in a year's time."

It was really cheering to see Gargrave human enough to lose his temper. "All right," I said, "I'll come after I've been through the mill in the Senate House and can smoke in Cambridge streets at night without danger of being proctorised and fined the gentle six-and-eight. So-long," I said, and turned into the butteries to talk over past undergraduate high-jinks with my old gyp.

Now if anything better had turned up, it is more than possible that I should have forgotten

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my engagement with Gargrave and gone elsewhere. I had had a very excellent three years in Cambridge some time before, as an irresponsible undergraduate, and was by no means averse to having a short retaste of the old lively scenes. But I could find no one that I knew who seemed at all interesting; the current undergraduates, looked at from the light of after years, seemed mere schoolboys; and in fact the larger part of my acquaintance seemed to consist of gyps, bedmakers, or tradesmen's assistants; and so *faute de mieux*, after I had been raised to the sublime degree of Magister Artium, I restored my borrowed hood, cap, gown, and bands to the tailor's, and strolled across to Gargrave's staircase.

I went in without knocking, *more Cantab.* He was fitting a new wax cylinder to a phonograph, and as he leaned over the machine and I saw the curves of his head, I thought of what a thousand pities it was that a man with such a magnificent brain should fritter it on such a useless life-work. The mummy case stood open against one of the walls, the mummy in it stripped of its swathings. The air was full of the sickly flavour of spices. I pulled out a cigar and lit it.

"Don't smoke," said Gargrave. "I must have the air here quite clear."

"Then open the window," I said. "The place stinks."

"You'll be used to the atmosphere directly.

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There's the mummy. What do you think of him?"

"Toughish *biltong*. Newer meat for me. He's well tattooed about the chest and arms, though."

"Those are not tattoo marks. Look closer. They are a pattern in the grain of the epidermis."

"So they are. Mr. Menen-Ra — isn't that his name? — is a curious beast."

"Curious! He's unique. Or at least he and his descendants are."

"Oh, those markings would not pass on to his son."

"So you say. But it appears they did."

"Have you got another mummy here, then?"

"I've got more than that. I've got one of his living descendants, he's due in this room almost directly."

"Humbug."

"You shall judge for yourself. You know the very man. He's Thompson-Pratt, of the bye-term above us."

"What, the demonstrator in the labs?"

"That same man. He's the lineal descendant of this mummy, as I've been at infinite pains to find out."

"And has he got the strawberry mark, or whatever you call it?"

"He has, line for line, pustule for pustule."

"Did he see your mummy and come up and claim it as a cousin?"

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"He did not. I discovered his markings for myself long before I saw the mummy. It was the term after you had gone down. He'd been on this staircase here to see the Dean, who was out. He slipped in coming down, and took a header, and got all the sense knocked out of him. I heard the noise. I was the only man in. So I went and picked him up, and brought him in here. He lay so still I thought he was dead, so I ripped open his shirt to see if I could feel his heart beating; and it was then that incidentally I came across the markings. I got him back to his senses again soon afterwards, and whilst he was lying on my sofa getting his nerves straight again, I told him what I had seen and asked him how they came there.

"He was furiously angry and said I'd taken a great liberty.

"'My good man,' I said, 'I didn't look for the things. I merely stumbled across them by accident.'

"'They are the curse of my life,' said he. 'I love swimming, and yet I daren't bathe in public. People hoot at me if I do. Look,' he said, and pulled back his shirt, and showed me his chest and the tops of his arms. 'I'm marked like the spotted man at the fair. I'm a blooming spectacle. My father's the same way, and so's the grand gov'nor, and so was his father before him. I suppose it's a sort of family curse, or some such rot as that, only we're too ashamed of

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the whole thing to have any yarn about it.' And then he pinned me not to tell about him, and then he went. I didn't worry my head more about the matter. Biology's outside my line, and Thompson-Pratt was not a man I had any special interest in at that period.

"Well, then, of course I went on with my work, and in time went to Egypt and got this mummy of Menen-Ra. I brought it home in its swathings, and didn't open it out till I got here. I'd procured it, as you know, for a certain purpose connected with one of my theories. But when I'd had the first glance at those markings on its skin, I let my original ideas go to the winds for the time being. So far as I could remember, they were the exact repetition of those carried by Thompson-Pratt.

"Here was a strange thing! I sat and thought of it hour after hour, and day after day. I tell you theories fairly bubbled out of me. At last I made up my mind what was to be done. But before I went further, I had got to know if the markings were exactly the same as Thompson-Pratt's. He made a big difficulty about it, and for a man who pretends to be scientific, I must say he was absurdly prejudiced. But he gave in at last, and let me take a photograph. I tell you it was simply marvellous: line for line, pustule for pustule, his markings were the same as the mummy's.

"Well, that was strong evidence, you'll say,

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but I wanted to go deeper. I've put an enormous amount of work into it; I've had scores of genealogy experts working for me; and I've had amazing luck. I've worked out the chain of descent in Egypt, Italy, France, England, Scotland, and England again without a break; and I've learned for an absolute certainty that Thompson-Pratt is the direct descendant of the Egyptian Menen-Ra, whose mummy you see against the wall yonder.

"And now," he went on, "I'll explain to you what I intend to do." But he did not explain to me then. The door opened and Thompson-Pratt came into the room. He nodded curtly enough to Gargrave, but he greeted me kindly. "Hullo, old man. How's the world using you? Heard you were up taking out your M.A. Staying up long?"

"Going down to-morrow. I've just come in here because Gargrave wanted to show me some tricks with his mummy."

"Damnation," said Thompson-Pratt to the owner of the rooms, "you haven't been talking about — er — secrets, have you?"

"No secrets will be given away unless you do it yourself," said Gargrave, oracularly. "I've just asked him in to be an independent witness."

"Oh, I see," said Thompson-Pratt, getting into a chair. "But look here, you know. I don't half like this experiment of yours."

"It's in the cause of science."

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"Science be sugared." He stared thoughtfully into the fire and then turned round and faced Gargrave squarely. "Look here, sir, if you are going to make use of me, I'm going to share some of the profits. You say that wrinkled, smelly person in the coffin yonder is my ancestor, and you are going to make me to talk his thoughts. Well, you may do it, or you mayn't. But if it does come off, it's just on the cards the old boy may let slip something in the natural science line which is strange to us to-day. I've a notion those old Egyptians were a lot ahead of us in some branches of chemistry, and if I could get hold of the way of making some new dye, for instance, to use with alizerene ——"

"You shall have a copy of every word that's said," Gargrave promised.

"From the phonograph? Yes, I see. But it'll be in what-d'you-call-em language — hieroglyphics, isn't it? Ancient Egyptian, I mean."

"You shall overlook my translation as I make it. Man, I mean to do fairly by you."

"Oh, all right," said Thompson-Pratt. "Don't get shirty. Only, a man must look after his own interests, y' know, that's all; and besides, it's a hundred to one the whole thing's a fizzle."

Gargrave set his teeth. "Have you any more to say?" he inquired.

"No," said Thompson-Pratt, with a bored yawn. "Wire in."

Now from where I sat on the table, I was

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watching the proceedings pretty carefully; and it struck me that Gargrave merely got a hypnotic influence over Thompson-Pratt in the usual way. He has told me since that he did something more, and perhaps this may be so; but anyway the patient seemed to go to sleep and to wake up again, and be entirely under the control of Gargrave's will. He made him lie down on the hearthrug in front of the fire, and then he took the mummy out of its case and laid that down on the hearthrug also, side by side with its living descendant. Then he told me to go out of the room.

"Whatever for?" I asked. "I thought you invited me here to see an experiment?"

"So I did. And you shall see it when the time comes. But I have one or two more preparations to make first, which I don't choose to be overlooked. You must go into my inner room."

"I have a rare big mind to go out of the place altogether."

"You can do it if you like, of course, but you are a fool if you do."

Well, perhaps it was undignified, but I shrugged my shoulders, and swallowed my pride, and marched off into the inner room. I will own I was getting curious as to what was coming next.

Gargrave came after me, and had the impertinence to lock the door on my heels. So there I was anyway, and as he seemed to have a dislike

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for smoking, I lit a pipe and filled the room with heavy reek.

I will give him credit for one thing, though. He did not keep me waiting long. He opened the door in a minute or so and said: "Sorry, old man, but I must keep my processes secret at any cost. Come in."

I went in. Thompson-Pratt and the man who had predeceased him some 3000 years were lying side by side on the hearthrug, to all appearance exactly as I had left them.

Evening was come on, the lamps had not been lit, and only the dancing, uncanny firelight illuminated the faces; and as I gazed a little closer, a curious thrill went through me. It was Thompson-Pratt's which seemed to be the dead face now. Behind the shrivelled mask of the mummy there was surely some flicker of life. Gargrave was bending down, arranging the mouthpiece of the phonograph over the mummy's lips, and as he moved aside I could have sworn I saw the long-dead limbs twitch. I took out a handkerchief and wiped my forehead. Gargrave saw me do it.

"Now don't be an idiot," he said. "There's nothing to be scared of. Just keep cool, and take accurate mental notes of all you see and hear." He tried to talk calmly, but I saw he was quivering with excitement for all that. He turned to the mummy and said something in a tongue I could not understand, enunciating each

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syllable most distinctly. I distinguished the word "Menen-Ra," but could make out nothing else.

Neither the mummy nor Thompson-Pratt gave any sign of having heard.

He repeated the sentence again, varying the pronunciation of the words, and this time got a reply.

"You must speak English if you wish me to understand," came the answer in a stifled, dusty voice directly from the mummy's lips.

Gargrave started, and I think he swore. "Why?" he asked savagely.

"Because I have forgotten the other — the old tongue."

"If I am being played with," said Gargrave, "there is one man here who will carry out of this room my marks on him for life."

There was no answer. He went on: "Do you know your name?"

"Menen-Ra."

"Where buried?"

"Thebes."

"You were not."

"I was buried at Thebes; but I should be taken afterwards to our family vault on the estate by Koorkoor, according to our custom."

"It was in the desert by the oasis of Koorkoor I found you. In what manner of grave?"

"Rock-hewn, with my titles carved above me."

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"Alone?"

"No, my four uncles, killed in war, would be with me."

"Were they all sound men?"

"No, my uncle Nepo, the last buried and so the next to me, had his right arm lopped off at the elbow: an old wound."

Gargrave broke off his questioning and hit the table excitedly. "That settles it," he cried. "No living soul knows what the grave was like except myself, and no one could have guessed it. And it's all absolutely exact. It's a miracle, but I've done it. The soul of Thompson-Pratt has gone back to its old abiding-place, and now I shall be told the history of 3000 years ago exactly as it happened, and I can give that history to the modern world. When he spoke English I thought there was fraud; but there isn't; it's just part of the natural lapse." He rubbed his hands. "Lord! how simple it is, and I'm the only man that's got the key." He turned again to the mummy. "Menen-Ra, I command you that you lift up your voice now in history, and tell us of the Government of Egypt, and of Pharaoh, and of Pharaoh's inner life, and the daily life you lived yourself, and the daily life of the people."

And the mummy in its dusty tones began to speak. There was no doubt about the genuineness of it all, that I can vouch for. The phraseology was certainly that of Thompson-Pratt,

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reader of the *Pink 'Un*, and Demonstrator in Chemistry at the Cavendish Labs. But the sentiments were those of ancient Egypt, spoken as no other men now living (except Gargrave and myself) ever heard them, but startlingly fresh and real. Not even the most imaginative student, redolent in the lore of that long-dead land, could have invented them. They were marvellous in their vivid truth. They were nothing short of a revelation.

But Gargrave cursed as he listened. He had looked for a dissertation on history, and he was getting *chroniques scandaleuses;* he had expected talk about Kings' policies, and he was hearing the tales of flirtations with their housemaids. He wanted descriptions of Council Chambers, and he got the dimensions of wine-shops. He had fallen into the error of thinking that all the men of bygone Egypt were as thoughtful and ponderous as the hoary few whose scribings have remained; and when he found that the ancient land contained devil-may-care pleasure-eaters like those that live in this land of ours to-day, he could have beaten himself in the fury of his disappointment.

For myself, as I listened whilst Menen-Ra prattled on, I laughed till the tears came, and my only regret — a professional one — was that I could not use up that unmatchable subject-matter hereafter. I was listening to the talk of a man-about-town, who lived in Thebes 3000

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years ago, and learning in detail exactly how he wasted his days and how he enjoyed his nights. He told us of his bets, his bouts, his light loves, and his serious entanglements. Every third sentence referred to a long-dead Chloe, evidently the Thäis of her day in that far-forgotten Thebes. Even allowing for Menen-Ra's obvious partiality, Chloe must have been a lady of wonderful powers, albeit she was a mere dancer by recognised profession. It was a gorgeous piece of description. But as it was given to us it would not publish; no, not even inside a yellow cover. And though I did note down a few items to make into future copy, I think I shall give them as my own. They are quite new, and no one will accuse me of lifting them; and, besides, it is merely foolishness to offer unasked-for explanations which no one will believe.

But I cannot say I heard as much as I wished. It was evident that Menen-Ra, after his silence of 3000 years, was equal to going on till midnight. But his was a mouth which could only speak on its own topic. Again and again Gargrave tried to lead this wanderer from a long-forgotten past on to the more weighty matters of state, and time after time he got back to talk about cock-fights, and dicing bouts, and ape-racing on the dry Nile banks; or else he would speak to us of Chloe and his other loves with a freedom which is quite obsolete to-day. He brimmed with these reminiscences. But he had no others of a graver

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sort. This Menen-Ra had lived for nothing but his own personal pleasure, and beyond the limits of that he knew no more than we moderns did about the larger affairs of his country.

Gargrave tried him on every topic. He asked about the army. Menen-Ra started off loud in the praises of his favourite gladiator, and gave us the latest betting on his approaching fight. Gargrave asked for some song of the priests of Osiris, and this faded roysterer promptly trolled forth a drinking chant that nearly split his dusky throat.

And at last, seeing the futility of getting what he wanted, Gargrave savagely put an end to the inquisition. He clapped a large sponge over the still white face of Thompson-Pratt, and took a green powder from the mantelpiece and threw it on the sponge. There was a *paff* of streaky flame, and Thompson-Pratt sprang up choking and spluttering.

"I say, good Lord, Gargrave, what devil's game have you been up to now? What have you been putting me to bed on the hearthrug with that old image for? Here! I say, have you got a whisky-and-soda? Get me some whisky, for heaven's sake. I'm nearly parched to death."

I mixed a drink, and handed it to him. He gulped half of it thirstily. Then he bethought him of a toast. He nodded towards the mummy on the floor. "Here's to you, old cock," said

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he, and emptied his tumbler to the dregs. "I wonder what the equivalent of whisky was in your benighted day? I bet you had your share of it, if you are ancestor of mine."

"You're a Goth," I said.

"I know," said Thompson-Pratt, "and I had a far better time of it than — say — a Constructive Egyptologist has. Come along to the Hoop and have some dinner. We'll leave Gargrave to go on thumbing at my unpleasant forefather."

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XII

THE LYNCHERS[1]

I

It all began round the fountain in the Cotton Exchange, where men gamble at the yell over futures, whilst the cigarette ends unroll themselves in the water below. I stood round there for a while doing a little business; strolled to the middle of the room, and settled with a shipping agent about a Liverpool consignment; went to a table at the other end, and conned the *Picayune* and the *Times Democrat*. All the while I was hungering to be gone. The close heat of the place oppressed me.

I ought to have stayed in the Cotton Exchange all day, to meet a man, as it were casually, on a point of the most delicate business diplomacy and *finesse*. It was this matter which solely had brought me all the way from Manchester, England, to New Orleans, Louisiana;

[1] Those who do not know the Black Belt of the United States will probably set down this tale as a more or less gratuitous libel; those who happen to have been in New Orleans during the September of 1893 will recognise most if not all of the incidents. — C. J. C. H.

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and on that day the man was almost certain to be about and in the mood favourable; but the distaste for the place and its hot, clamorous atmosphere grew upon me.

At last I threw down my palm fan and stood up. I could endure it no longer. If the whole of my fortune instead of only a part had depended upon my remaining, I could not have stayed. You need not ask me more definitely why: I can give you no adequate reason; I suppose my nether angel must have clinched his fingers for a good grip just then.

There was no settled design in my mind as to what to do next. I wandered into the Pickwick Club and out again, and then took a bit of a stroll down Canal Street towards the levee. The midday heat was brazen, and the stink from the open grey sewer at the pavement side came up to one in fat, sickly breaths. I turned again, went to the Chess and Checkers Club for a julep, and then out again, still restless, still oppressed. To get a whiff of breeze I took one of the trolley cars which run down St. Charles's Avenue. You never have to wait for those: they follow on the heels of one another all day long, and through many hours of the night.

Inside was a gingerbread-coloured woman fanning herself. She nodded me good-day. In the reflection of an advertisement-mirror I saw the pink of my own braces showing wetly through the back of my white alpaca coat. It was terribly

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hot. The car took us out from the business zone to streets of dwelling-houses, stopping at the block corners for occasional passengers. And then we went on through the prettier *boulevard* which is flanked by innumerable frame houses of every tint with their gardens of foliage plants, and past an occasional house of stone, which denotes the residence of Israel; and we branched to the right by the levee and ran up to the terminus.

There were others in the car, breeze-seekers like myself; and with these I had intended to return; but again whim thrust me afoot. I got out and walked; walked on till the trim frame houses thinned, and nigger cabins appeared, and empty lots peopled with meat cans and broken glass; and still I wandered further, to the very fringes of the city.

There rose a bit of a knoll by the wayside, and on it I climbed and sat down. On one hand of me was New Orleans, with its many hideous, straddling Eiffel towers, built to carry the electric wires; in front, the blistering silver of Lake Pontchartrain; on the left hand, forest and swamp, and still more swamp.

Sitting still in the glare of the sun brought out perspiration afresh. A hundred yards away a man was stretched out under the shadow of a white oak. The grey straggles of Spanish moss with which the tree was hung dangled lankly in the moist heavy air; but the shade looked cool. I went towards it.

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A few sunbeams stole through the upper branches on to the turf, and in these a pair of purple-black butterflies flashed and reflashed, vanishing when they entered the flanking shadows. The theatre of their dance was just above the head of the man who lay upon the ground, and though they seemed disturbed by his presence in no whit, on my approach they flitted cautiously behind the clump of palmettos in the background. It seemed to me that the man was very fast asleep, and I envied him. He, at least, was beyond the discomforts of that glaring day.

I sat me down at the opposite rim of the white oak's shade, with hands locked round my knees, and looked upwards at the hot sky. A foul, ragged bird, with red, bare head, was sailing in small, slow circles directly overhead. I looked again, and in the depths of the gleaming blue saw other specks of black, which grew as I watched. They were other birds coming off their distant beats in answer to some signal from the first. The birds were turkey buzzards.

Involuntarily I shuddered, surprising myself by the action, and then lowered my eyes from the carrion fowl to see if I could make out what dead thing it was which had lured them from their patrol. My glance ran round the space in front without seeing any matter to fill the question, and fell on the figure of the sleeping man in the shade beside me. He had not moved since I came. Watching more closely I could see no tremor of

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his body, not even the gentle movement of breathing. He was sleeping like a figure cast in metal. Upon his white, upturned face mosquitoes were feasting unchecked: a great, bloated horse-fly had lodged itself in the fork of one of his thumbs.

"My friend," thought I, "you must have an extraordinary amount of liquor on board to stand so much. You'll be in torment when you wake if this goes on. Let me drive that horse-fly away."

I tore down a green palmetto leaf for a fan, and walked across. The insects rose in a buzzing cloud, but the man never moved his skin.

Something in his apathy moved me like a blow, and I started back, dropping the fan on to the short scrub grass. Then leaning over, I took the hand which lay on his breast, and lifted it. The joints moved harshly; and when I let go it sprang back with a stiff-fingered thud on to his breast.

"Dead!"

Yes, dead beyond a doubt; and after the first shock of discovery, one's impulse was to seek for the cause. My eyes roved curiously over his figure from head to toes, and from toes to crest again. Then I began to understand the matter. On the ground beneath the left ear was a squat, dark brown cone as high as a shilling's worth of pence. It was coagulated blood.

The sense of the day's heat went from me. My damp clothes hung upon me cold and clammy.

After a pause I knelt; then raised the head, and peered beneath it. At the back was a

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ghastly hole, ringed round by charred flesh and burnt hair. The man must have been shot at hand-grips. He was dead as an axe.

I started back to my feet, and stood with shaking knees wondering what ought to be done. Help to the man himself there was none to be given. The position of the wound and the absence of a weapon precluded the idea of a suicide. Clearly he had been murdered.

My life had been lived on humdrum office stools, and in my daily newspaper I had always skipped anything approaching to tragedy. These things filled me with physical nausea. And here I was thrust by the shoulders into the inner chamber of horrors. My first idea was to bolt incontinently: my second, to go forthwith and lay information with the police: it seemed best to me that I should act upon the second. But, thought I, it would be better to learn first the victim's name.

Yes, this last amendment appeared unanswerable.

With infinite loathing I reached down to take a handkerchief from his breast pocket. My eyes swam, and my fingers trembled like a palsied woman's, as I plucked it away. It seemed to come with reluctance. It was of fine linen, hemstitched round the borders, and of clammy wetness. I spread it out against the sun, and because of my dazed eyes could see no name; and then was about to examine each corner separately

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when a startling thing happened. A pistol shot rang out into the hot air, and then another, and then what seemed to be a whole platoon. I heard the bullets whisp past me and patter against the lower branches of the white oak and the leaves of the palmettos; and one hit my straw hat in the brim and spun it a fathom away on to the coarse turf. Looking up, I saw two men reloading smoking revolvers.

"Gentlemen," I gasped, "for God's sake what are you doing?"

"You bloody murderer," said one, "the law mayn't get you, but I guess we will."

"I'm innocent," I screamed. "I swear to you I know nothing about what's done here. I came up by accident, found by accident that he was dead, and was just looking for his name when ——"

"Liar! The boy saw you shoot him down from behind, and ran for help. We were the first men he found heeled. You blasted nigger!"

Nigger! I'm no nigger. I'm an Englishman."

You may be a Liberian for anything I care; but nigger you are, because the boy saw your worsted hair as I see it now — and the turkey buzzards are waiting for you."

The man lifted his pistol again as he spoke, and took a steady shot over the crook of his elbow. The bullet seared my ribs. I turned and fled like a frightened dog.

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II

Into what wilderness that wild, mad flight took me I could not tell. The most abject fear blinded my eyes, even as it lent wings to my feet. The two men started after me on the instant. The lead from their weapons outstripped me in the race, but they themselves could not. I was unscathed by the first discharge, and when they slackened speed to reload I passed out of shot.

Panting, sweating, aching, my chest and forehead alike fit to burst, I held along my course, instinctively edging from the road and making for the dense cover of the forest ahead. The insensate fear of the animal possessed me wholly then, and, animal-like, it seemed to me that the recesses of the timber were my only harbourage.

They must have viewed me till I got amongst the trees, for nowhere did the bushes and grasses of the open rise more than shoulder-high. My movement in bird flight was necessarily slow, for there were deep black pools to skirt, and bosky swamps which clogged the footsteps. As I dived into the outskirts of the timber a great shout went up behind me, and for a moment I glanced back. The pursuers had been reinforced. Straggling away in a long tail, which reached up to the yellow streak of road behind, the hunt must have numbered a hundred souls. And all these would have killed me like a rabid beast did the chance come to them!

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I turned and ran afresh, crashing through the undergrowth, threading my way through the clumps of cypress trees. The grey streamers of Spanish moss hung down from the branches and brushed my face as I tore past. Broken fragments entered my parched and gaping mouth.

Once I stopped at a pool to drink. The black water was rich with sulphur, but it tasted to me like the nectar of the gods. I started up from my knees with panic reawakened. The shouts of the pursuers came to me echoing down the tree aisles. They were still hot on the trail. I skirted the pool and plunged deeper into the welded masses of the forest. And so on, and on; and — and for a space I recollect no more.

III

Yet, even after I lost my few scattered remnants of sense, I must have continued my flight. The flesh was stronger than the mind, and my feet carried me out at the further side of the forest and well into the marshy plain beyond, before they finally set me down senseless and well-nigh inanimate.

Night was advanced when I came to consciousness again, a heavy, dank night, with the darkness closing down on one in hot panting beats. The smell of the swamp around was thick with sulphurous fumes. The noise of the frogs and the

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crickets and the jarflies was almost deafening. Overhead not a star shone through the veil, but amongst the mists on either hand the fireflies spurted their tiny flames, and here and there shone the phosphorescent gleam of rotting wood. Occasionally a blink of summer lightning showed me things more clearly.

I knew not where I was. The wish for further flight was still intense within me, but I knew not which way to turn, and accordingly cowered still in my form.

Morning came, and the fœtid mists of the swamp were rolled up for the day. I stood stiffly up and looked around me. I was in the midst of a wet plain, cut by the railroad to Mobile. Only here and there a copse of trees broke the level. As I looked, I saw a man running.

He was coming towards me at a jog-trot, his head down like a dog following a scent. Occasionally he stopped as if at fault, and peered about him. He was on my trail.

My first idea was to run; my second to stay. The pursuer was only one. Perhaps I could induce him to listen to reason. Why should I, an innocent man, submit to be the quarry of this ruthless chase? If he attacked me, I would fight him with my naked hands; and let the sin of his blood lie upon his own head.

I ambushed myself behind a tussock of palms, and waited his coming. If he threatened me

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with any weapon, why then I should not hesitate to act.

He trotted up to the place where I had slept, and halted, regarding it thoughtfully. He was a man of my own height, with white but slightly negroid features, and yellow, kinky hair. In his right hand he carried a Marlin repeating rifle. I stepped out and confronted him.

"Oh, this is where you have got to!" said he.

"This is where I have been driven."

"You ran well," he replied slowly, looking me up and down. "I ought to say that I am indebted to you. They mistook you for me."

"Then it was you who ——"

"Yes, I killed the man you found under the white oak. You're a stranger here, or you wouldn't have meddled with him, especially as you are ——"

He paused, and I asked him to finish his sentence. "A coloured man like myself."

"I a nigger! Good Lord, what next?"

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "I can see by your clothes that you don't class yourself as such. Perhaps colour don't count for so much your side. Have your own way about it, pardner. But say, what do you propose to do?"

"Make the best of my way back to New Orleans."

"Bah! You'll be shot on sight if you try coming out of this swamp. There are twenty-

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five hundred men round it. Cotton is slack in the city just now," said the fellow with bitter satire, "and so is sugar, and every man who owns a gun has come out for the sport. They've pickets everywhere. They're making a regular campaign of it."

"But I am an innocent man. You are the real ——"

"Murderer? If it pleases you to say so, yes. But what does that matter? Here, read."

He thrust a paper into my hand, and putting tobacco into his mouth, sat down upon the ground. I did the same, with the paper crackling between my fingers. The flimsy news-sheet was given entirely over to the murder and the chase for the killer, full of sensational "scare" headlines, daubed with tawdry drawings. There were two horrid cuts of negroes hanging by the neck to trees; and I learnt with cold thrills that these were the cousin and brother of the murderer. The lynchers had come upon them, could extract none of the information they desired as to the fugitive's whereabouts, either because these captives did not know or would not tell, and had incontinently strung them up to the nearest convenient place. "This action on the part of some of our citizens may appear high-handed," the reporter wrote, "but those who are disposed to judge them should remember that both of the deceased were bad niggers, and would certainly have come to grief sooner or later. A bad nigger

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on a telegraph post does less mischief than two bad niggers in the bush."

I let the paper flutter down amongst the reed-grass. "Chew?" said the man, offering me tobacco. I shook my head. I was dazed.

Then feeling that I must say something, I asked, "What did you shoot this fellow at all for?"

"Look here, siree," said the man, savagely, "did you kill him or did I?"

"You did."

"Very well, then, pard; you mind your own biz. I guess God's got him down to my account, and I've to settle it up myself. He'll know, and He'll see it isn't so bad of me as men down here might think. What we're talking about now is your fix. I'm sorry you're in dirty water through me, and I'm grateful to you for dividing the hunt till now. That's why I want to help. Are you heeled?"

"Am I what?"

"Bah! no, I see you aren't. Well, here's a gun for you. I've got the Winchester, and I guess that'll see me through." He drew a five-shot revolver from the back pocket of his blue cotton trousers and handed it to me. "And here's shells. Now she is loaded, and if you have the chance, pard, you shoot. I guess you'll be cornered sooner or later, and if you've got to go under, it's kinder satisfactory pumping lead into the crowd as you go. I reckon"—here he patted

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the rifle — "I reckon with luck I should have thirteen of 'em here."

"But is there no chance of slipping through this cordon? Once in New Orleans we should be all right."

"You would; not me. Man, even if I was in the city gaol they'd have me out to lynch. Probably" — here he shivered — "probably they'd burn me. No, I'm going to see it through in the open. But you're thinking of yourself."

"Of course I am."

"Right, why shouldn't you? You have served me a good turn, and I'd help you if I could. But I don't see my way. Yonder's the lake (Pontchartrain), and yonder, and yonder, and yonder's all their pickets. They don't let a soul pass outer here without some one knows him. I tell you they've rubbed panic into all the cullered folk round this district. Cabins are deserted by the score. The niggers are going away in flocks. They know these murdering vigilants are out for sport, and for two pins would shoot down any poor devil with a touch of black in his hide, just as you or I would a rattle. Yes, siree, there's a big scare on. There's nothing for us to do at present but sit on our tails and wait. Here's victuals."

He lugged from his pocket a small tin of salmon, and opening it with his knife gave me half on a slab of heavy corn bread. I ate it greedily. I only put one other question then.

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"If," said I, "you picked up my trail, why could not they?"

"Because I destroyed the sign of the pair of us. I'm not altogether a fool, sonny, and if woodcraft 'ud pull us through, our insurance might be worth purchase. But it won't. You'd better sleep if you can. You'll want your strength."

IV

I must, through sheer weariness, have slept throughout the greater part of that day, because when I awoke the sun had already dived from sight. It was twilight then, and since a Louisiana summer day has but a short gloaming, I knew that soon it would be night. But it was not this that had roused me: it was a reek of smoke biting in my chest. I stood up and looked about me.

Good God! the reeds had been fired along a line five miles in length. They were as dry as tinder, and a wind had sprung up which was driving the flames towards me. The murderer stood at my elbow watching them moodily.

"We must run," I cried.

"Where to? That would be playing their game. Don't you see they want the fire to act as beater? They expect it to drive us to the creek down yonder, and they've got guns posted every ten yards to pot us as we come up. If

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you're eager for the battue, you go. I stay here."

"To be burnt to death?"

"Not if I can help it. But I tell you it's an outside chance. We must take to the water. Come."

He led the way to one of the black pools of the swamp, and I followed. The flames had crept so near that we could hear the crackle of the reed-grass as it caught; and overhead the wind was carrying glowing cinders which lit new fires as they fell. We stepped over the edge, sinking deeply in nauseous slime. Sulphurous gases rushed up from below in glistening bubbles which almost suffocated us. An eel squirmed away from under my foot.

The stinging smoke by this time well-nigh blinded us, but ever and anon canals of clear air drifted through it, and adown these we could see the tawny billows of flame standing out crisply against the night. A heat wave swept in front of them, scorching us like the breath of a furnace.

We cowered in the stinking yellow water, coughing and choking, every minute finding it more difficult to breathe. The sedges by the side of our pool caught fire and shot out at us tongues of greedy flames. We had to drop our heads beneath the surface to avoid them.

Then, as though our miseries were not sufficient, another thing happened. The pool, it

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seemed, had a more regular tenant than chance lodgers like ourselves. On our entrance he had been lying *en perdu* amongst the reeds; but when the fire touched his shelter, he too made instinctively for the water — an eight-foot alligator.

Now alligators have been so hunted for their skins throughout the South that the survivors are eager to flee at the sight of man; but here the circumstances were unusual. I think I have shown that the murderer was a man of physical courage; but, chancing to look up at him when the hideous reptile came in to share our refuge, I saw a face of livid terror. I dare say my own was not much different, but his fright seemed to me then an apology for my own, and, strange though it may seem, I drew comfort from it. With the waves of flame still singing and booming overhead it was sheer death to attempt a withdrawal; yet to my dying day I shall never forget my sensations then. I had seen the foul brute's jagged yellow teeth, when it flopped beneath the surface, and every second I expected to find the great jaws clamped upon my body. If ever a man can perspire with terror under water, I did it then.

But at last the thick of the fire rolled away from us, and in the dim half-light which followed its passage I saw the great alligator slowly rise to the surface and swim away from us down a narrow gut which had opened in the swamp.

My companion also saw the reptile rise, and

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drew the wrong conclusion. He thought it was about to attack him, and with a scream scrambled out of the pool. Then a rifle-shot rang out above the din, and he gave another scream, and threw up his hands and fell upon the black surface of the pool and sank from sight amid fountains of yellow splashes.

Then some one from behind said, "Hullo! by gum, there's another of them," and I heard a click of a hammer.

"For God's sake, don't shoot!" I yelled.

"I should know that voice. Faith! Martin Brail, by all that's wonderful. So it was you we were chivvying all yesterday afternoon, was it? Well, old man, I'm very sorry for the mistake, though you certainly did give us a rattling good run. However, that's over now, so come out of your lair and we'll go back to town and have the best dinner Victor can fix up for us, even if it takes till six o'clock to-morrow morning to eat it. I'm glad I plugged that damned murdering nigger. I say, though, let's look at you again. D' you know, old chap, you are really very much like him. It's quite simple how the mistake arose."

"It was mighty near being an awkward mistake for me."

"But not quite," laughed the Southerner; "and misses don't count. Come along. You'll have heaps to talk about at the clubs for the next week to come. And I say, Brail, of course

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you aren't a nigger, old man, and don't get your back up by thinking that I even suggest such a thing — but sometimes it isn't healthy even to look like one down in the South here. If I were you, I'd let those short crisp curls on your head grow, and then dye 'em an aggressive red, and soap 'em down flat and lanky. You'll find your life go a heap safer and easier that way."

"I think," I said, "my hair is likely to turn grey within the next day or two. You have knocked about twenty years off my life by this little mistake of yours. As hosts, you Southerners are glorious; but as hunters, I may say you are devils."

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Both are getting away from their society

XIII

THE FASCINATING MRS. WHITEHEAD

THE worst of a steamer flirtation is that you are more or less bound to see it through. Gilchrist went to Las Palmas in Grand Canary by a British African boat because they start from Liverpool, near which port he resided. Mrs. Whitehead went by the same steamer because she thought there was less likelihood of meeting people who knew her there than there would be on one of the bigger and faster Cape boats which go from the South of England. And to further this coy desire she decapitated her name, and appeared on the purser's list as Mrs. White. Gilchrist foregathered with her before they had brought Holyhead over the quarter, because he and she were the only two passengers who had not seen the necessity of going below to lie down.

"Will you let me lash your deck chair?" he said by way of introduction. "The sea'll get worse as soon as we open up the Channel more, and you may get a nasty spill."

He very naturally got leave to do that, and (quite as naturally) wedged himself in a corner beside her, and began to talk. That was the

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beginning of it all. By the time they had got abreast of Land's End he had discovered that her Christian name was Elsie, and by the time they had crossed the Bay, and were carrying the brown hills of Portugal along on their port beam, he had dropped into the habit of letting slip the name of Elsie with the most skilled unconsciousness whenever there was no one else within ear-shot.

He was not exactly new to this sort of game, and no more was she. They owned up to the fact cheerfully. "I do hate callow youths," said Mrs. White; and, "When I find myself paired off with schoolgirls under two-and-twenty," said Gilchrist, "I bolt as soon as I conveniently can, and have a comfortable swear. Let me drag you a chair behind the lifeboat there, and then you can smoke a cigarette."

"One more cushion, please, just under my head," said Mrs. White, "and now tuck the rug in round my feet. There, thanks, that's nice. Now some men would be shocked at my sitting here and smoking, when half Portugal might be looking on at us through race-glasses, for anything we know. Others would be greedy and keep all their cigarettes to themselves. You are neither one nor the other, and therefore I like you."

"Therefore I'm an infinitely lucky man," said Gilchrist.

"I think you are pretty lucky all the way

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round. Nothing to do except amuse yourself. You certainly aren't going to Grand Canary for the good of your health, because you're the picture of that already; and I can't say you've got quite the cut of a man who's going there on business."

"Oh, I'm going to kick up my heels, and walk about, and climb the mountains, and eat oranges and avocado pears. At intervals I shall play a little golf."

"Delightful programme. Nothing to do but amuse yourself. But don't you get rather tired of it sometimes?"

"It hasn't bored me so far. When a man's had enough of one thing he can try another."

"That depends on the man's income. It's an expensive game ringing the changes too often."

"Well, I suppose it is, come to think of it," said Gilchrist. "I started the yachting mania last summer. That came in rather heavy for a first outfit of materials."

"Evidently," said Mrs. White, with a sigh, "you are a young man having many possessions. What a blessed comfort it must be to get away from the region of narrow means."

Gilchrist thought the matter over at greater length that night when the lights had been switched off in the smoke-room and the other passengers had turned in; and he came to several conclusions. Above all things he was satisfied that it was entirely without drawbacks to

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be well off. He also gave a good deal of his time to thinking over Mrs. White. He didn't quite know whether he was in love with her or not; he couldn't quite define what being in love meant; but he was completely satisfied she was the nicest woman on that particular steamer, and possibly on many steamers. Moreover, he reminded himself that he was thirty-two, and was under instructions from various relatives who took an interest in him, to get married without any further dawdling over it.

To think over a matter of this kind, *solus*, at sea, and under the suggestive stars, is a very different affair from doing the same prosaically at home. Mrs. White did not turn up all the next morning; and not caring for anybody else on board, he was bored with his own society. In the afternoon she was also absent, and he grew more bored. And in the evening, when she showed up again, he proposed in the first ten minutes, out of sheer relief at seeing her again.

"Oh, and now I am happy," said Mrs. White.

He kissed her a great many times — she had an excellent method of kissing — and they arranged to get married in three months' time in London, and spend the honeymoon at his shooting place in Scotland. "But we won't let the cat out of the bag yet, dear," said Gilchrist, "and then we can have our fun in Las Palmas without being pointed out and giving a free comic entertainment to all the other people."

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"No, darling," said Mrs. White. "We'll keep the engagement as our own dear sweet secret till we get back to England."

But — from what source no one seemed exactly to know — the little episode was being passed about the ship in strictly confidential whispers during the very next morning; and by midday everybody was chuckling over it and ostentatiously avoiding stares; and at dinner the captain stood champagne all down the tables, and the health of the pair of them was drunk with enthusiasm and music. Gilchrist smiled as he returned thanks, and tried not to feel savage; and the hard-up men who were going down to serve on the West Coast of Africa got drunk that night, or mournfully sentimental, according to their natures. But they one and all during the course of the evening came and hit Gilchrist on the back several times, and told him what a lucky chap he was; and each time Gilchrist thanked them most cordially, and assured himself with unnecessary emphasis that they were undeniably right.

When the steamer was coming into Las Palmas harbour, Mrs. White was examining with a glass the semi-detached island which carries the lighthouse. "They've taken it down," said she.

Gilchrist asked what.

"That staring white notice on the hillside there. 'Grand Canary Engineering Company,' it used to be."

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"Oh, you've been here before, have you? I didn't know. You never told me."

"Ye-es—didn't I tell you?—at the Metropole. But I shall stay at the Hotel Catalina now."

"That was before you were left a widow?"

"Oh, of course, my husband was there. Do run down, there's a dear boy, and make them bring up my boxes. I tipped that wretched steward, and he hasn't done it yet."

Gilchrist went away below, and as he had his own packing to finish, he did not see an English gentleman come off in the doctor's boat, greet Mrs. White very warmly, exchange a few words with her, and then return hurriedly to shore consumed with abundant laughter. But he was up in time to see the letters brought into the saloon by the shore agent, and to watch Mrs. White take up a telegram most legibly addressed to "Whitehead."

"Ah," said Mrs. White, with a sigh of vast relief, "then it is all right."

Gilchrist experienced a peculiar little thrill. The name of Whitehead carried recent memories for him. It would have done the same for any one who had been lately in England. So he inquired, "What's all right?"

"My news," said Mrs. White, cheerfully.

"Mayn't I share them?"

"Sure you want to, dear?"

"Of course," said Gilchrist, and hoped that he was speaking in his natural voice.

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"It's all right, dear," said his *fiancée*. "I can marry you. I wasn't *quite* sure before, because law is so risky, although this was nearly a certain thing. But they've wired me to say that we've got the decree *nisi*, so as soon as the time's run out ——"

"What!" cried Gilchrist, "you're the Mrs. Whitehead the papers have been crammed with? Oh Lord!" And his mind galloped through a ream of unrefreshing details.

"I'm the lady," said she.

"But I knew nothing of this."

"You never asked me."

"Well, our little farce can't go on."

"Which, pray?"

"Well, if you want it in plainer words, my engagement to you."

"Oh, that's your small game, is it?" said she, smiling sweetly. "Then I'd better see the captain and two or three of the other gentlemen here at once, and get their evidence put down in writing."

Gilchrist whistled.

"You'll look after my things, won't you, till I come back? There's the purser. I'll go and catch him before he's off ashore."

"Wait a minute," said Gilchrist. "What are you after?"

"Isn't it obvious? Am I going to have my feelings tossed about in this way?"

"That means 'breach of promise.' But you won't get it, you know."

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"I shall have a very good try," said madame, dryly. "You will look after those things, won't you, till I go and see the purser?"

"No, wait another minute, please. Law's expensive, and I should think you've had enough airing in the papers lately."

"On the contrary, so much, that a little more will make no difference. In fact, it will turn the laugh my side. But as for you, my dear boy, you're different. It will come as a refreshing novelty."

"As I say, law's uncertain, and it's ten to one you'd lose your case. But look here, I've got a couple of hundred pounds in notes. Will you take that and call it quits?"

"My excellent sir, the 'feelings' are going to cost you a cool thousand if you pay for them now."

"Don't you wish you may get it?"

"I don't very much mind, because I shall ask for ten thousand if we fight, and I should very much prefer to finger ten."

Gilchrist didn't swear, first because it is rude to swear before a lady, and secondly because he didn't know words enough to do justice to the occasion. Instead he went into the saloon and wrote out a cheque, for which he received a very satisfactory document in return. Afterwards he went ashore.

He met Mrs. White-Whitehead frequently during the ensuing month in Las Palmas, and they

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always bowed to one another most cordially, but they never spoke. She was always with another man, and once, when he went into the hotel where they were staying, he found out the other man's name. Then he whistled again, most thoughtfully. The name was not new to him. He had read it several times before, in the very same newspaper paragraphs where he had read so much about Mrs. Whitehead.

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XIV

THE FIRE

THE first-class carriage we were in was heated by steam, we had each abundance of coats and rugs, our feet were on a fresh foot-warmer, but the draught of the hurricane crept in by a score of chinks, and the vehemence of the cold made us ache. At Doncaster we moved across to the dining-car, and found that a trifle more endurable; but still I noted that Gerard's moustache continued to glisten with icicles.

At Grantham we had still further evidence (if such a thing were needed) of the lowness of the temperature. The express, which is timed to stop there only three minutes at the outside, made a wait that seemed interminable. The conductor, I saw, was getting uneasy. At length he buttoned his coat and went out into the freezing gale on the platform. In a minute he returned, purple-cheeked and blowing his fingers. He came to us with the tidings. Both driver and stoker of our engine were, it seemed, half perished with the exposure to that bitter cold; it was with difficulty they had brought the express to a standstill in the station; and they

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were utterly unfit to proceed farther. It was doubtful, the conductor said, whether one of them, but I forget which it was, would recover; and meanwhile the railway authorities were seeking substitutes to take us on to London. He said, too, that news had been brought down of a colossal fire in Hammersmith, but could add no details.

"Nice weather this for getting married in," said I; "if we'd had warning of this blizzard beforehand, I should either have shirked being your best man, or suggested having the affair postponed."

"If to-morrow's like this," said Gerard, "the wedding can't take place till the weather changes. It would be brutal to drag any woman out into such a nipping cold."

We saw men filling the engine with buckets from a well outside the station, because the ordinary water supply was frozen solid; and then the train began to move again, and slid out of Grantham into the open country. The south-westerly hurricane beat upon it till the flanges of the lee wheels grated upon the rails with a roar of sound; and in some of the heavier squalls I thought we should have been upset. A queer, lurid light hung in the sky. But with dogged slowness we crawled on, and drew up under the shelter of King's Cross station.

It was four o'clock, and we were three hours late. There was a bellow of life from the depar-

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ture side of the station. I don't think I ever heard such a noise of trains and passengers; but where we were, the place seemed deserted. Half the roof was off, and there was not a porter to be seen. The platform was littered with dirty, trodden snow.

We got out, and I noticed that there were only two other passengers in the train. The conductor of the diner put out our luggage, and Gerard told him to order a hansom. There was only one on the rank — a thing that had never been known before since King's Cross station was built.

We got into that lonely cab, and told the muffled driver to take us to Queen's Gate, in Kensington. As the glass door was clattering down, a boy came out of some sheltered corner, and thrust in a paper.

"Evening paper, sir?" he cried. "There's half Chelsea on fire."

"Give him a penny, Methuen," said Gerard.

"No, sir," said the boy. "Five bob or nothing. I've only two papers left, and there's ten firemen killed. They say half London will be burnt."

I fumbled out two half-crowns, and the window closed down with a clash, and the cab drove off. Then I bent my head over the fluttering sheet and scanned the headlines: "*Disastrous fire.*" "*Fanned by the furious gale.*" "*All hydrants frozen.*" "*Every drop of water in London solid*

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ice." "*Nothing to check the flames.*" "*Metropolis in terrible danger.*" "*Suicide of the Chief of the Fire Brigade.*"

The sky about us was full of driving blackness, but a strange yellow glare hung beneath it, and the print stood out clearly:—

"The fire in Hammersmith, which we reported in our last edition," I read, "has since assumed gigantic proportions. The united fire brigades of London are helpless to cope with it. The unprecedented severity of the frost, and the fury of the hurricane, which is now upon us, have set at derision all our vaunted precautions.

"It is with water alone that our fire-extinguishing services have been hitherto armed to fight devouring flames; and now in this moment of our desperate need even a trickle of water is denied them. They are as helpless as the lay citizens.

"The fire in its awful majesty has beat down all resistance. Hammersmith is a burnt-out rubbish heap. West Kensington is a furnace. Amongst the dwellers in South Kensington and Chelsea there is more panic than an invading army could produce. So far as human eye can see, nothing but a change of wind or an act of God can save the greatest city ever built by man from being in the next few hours changed to twisted, smoking ruins."

Gerard dropped the paper with a cry of horror, and thrust up the hatch. "A fiver if you keep your horse at a gallop," he shouted to the cabman. "My God, Methuen," he said to me, "what an awful thing this is!"

"The newspaper has made the worst of it for the sake of the sensation," I answered. "Lon-

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don is not built of wood; it is an impossible thing for the whole of it to burn."

"I'm thinking of Queen's Gate, and my little girl there. She'll have expected me three hours ago, and I'm here now."

The cab stopped with a jar against the curb. I scraped the frost rime from a window, and peered out. Five great dray-loads of household goods were coming thundering past us, with the horses at a gallop. We got beyond them, and entered Piccadilly. The street was one solid block of every imaginable kind of vehicle, bearing salvage and fugitives eastwards. With infinite trouble, our cabman wormed his way across the struggling mass, and tried to take us on our road by the smaller streets to southward; but these were one and all brim-filled by the traffic, or blocked by broken-down vehicles.

Gerard's impatience grew too great to be held in check any longer. He sprang from the cab, gave the man a ten-pound note, with orders to follow as best he could, and started off through the hurrying crowds on foot.

Then for the first time we began fully to realise the fright which had bitten into five millions of people. The most orderly city on earth had turned into a seething nest of anarchy. Even the police made no effort to quell the terror or curb its lashings: they had their own houses and their own lives to think about. And as we went on, with the gale beating in our faces,

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we ourselves became smitten with the prevailing spirit.

We jostled and thrust at every one that came in our way; we climbed over broken-down loads of rarities which lay in the roadways as though they had been so much coal. Three times I saw bodies lying motionless in my path, and the passers-by cursed as they stumbled against them, but no one stopped to help.

And once I saw a woman of elegant dress, who was driving a landau filled with trunks and boxes, drop the reins when a heavy dray cut off one of her wheels, and pull out a pistol and kill herself before a thousand lookers-on. But no one gave her more than a cursory glance. Each one looked ahead on his own path, and hurried away about his business, wrestling and thrusting amongst the others. And every minute the crush thickened, and every by-street vomited people.

The air grew warmer as we pressed on westwards. There was no glimpse of flame apparent yet; nothing but fat, black rolls of smoke could be seen overhead, with an underlining of yellow reflected from the distant blaze. And everywhere hung icicles, and the lines of the bursted water-mains glistened in the roadways. We were in an Arctic city more like St. Petersburg than the London we had known before.

There was the taint of burning in every breath we drew, and from the inky sky above fell a

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constant patter of charred embers. As we drew on, these embers grew bright, and by the time we were through Brompton (and seven had clanged out from some clock in the neighbourhood), live sparks were falling on the seething mobs in the streets, and the air grew sour with the smell of singeing cloth.

But by the time we got abreast of the South Kensington Museum, the glow of the flames was beginning to smear more lurid yellows against the amorphous black of the driving smoke clouds; and soon the thunder of the blaze and the crash of the trundling masonry came to us in a dim roar above the booming and swishing of the gale. The great warren of dwelling-houses to westward of us yielded up its thousand emigrants every minute. The fugitives had started out of home hugging their dearest possessions; but the din of that awful enemy which was sacking the city at their heels thrust terror into their hearts; and they had it taught them that to each one naked life is dearer than all else the world contains. So the streets were paved with the cream of the household goods, and we smashed with our feet a Jew's ransom with every mile we went.

The fire was advancing whole streets by the hour. Earl's Court was already half burnt out; the houses in a line with Cornwall Gardens and Emperor's Gate were beginning to yield up trickles of fire through their windows. The bright scoriæ from the volcano of fire fell around and on us

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more thickly as we pressed on. The mob thinned as we drew towards the seat of the blaze, and when we turned up Queen's Gate, the street, though half filled by furniture and *débris*, was almost deserted by human beings. The population had fled already. The gale was sending the flames horizontally, like the jet from a blow-pipe, across the house-tops.

Gerard by this time was nearly beside himself with anxiety and foreboding. But at last we reached the house, and Gerard dashed up the steps. The girl whom that morning he had thought to make his bride within the next thirty hours stood waiting for him in the doorway.

"Oh, my love," I heard her say, as she leant on his shoulder, "I am here alone. They have all gone. But you said you would come for me; and I knew you would if you were alive; and if you were not, I did not wish to live either."

But meanwhile the heat was growing upon us, and whilst I stood and watched, I saw flames beginning to spout from the upper windows of a house near the Cromwell Road.

A swirl of smoke came up and stung my eyes like nettles. "Look," I said, "we must go. This house will be burning in another ten minutes;" and at the word Miss Vivian picked up a jewel-case from a table in the hall, and came with Gerard down the steps. We were walking quickly northwards, and as we were passing Queen's Gate Terrace a man joined us whom I

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knew. His name is an old and honoured one, but I omit it here for the sake of others who have borne the title.

"Oh!" he cried, "I am beggared! Fifty-five and beggared! What is that you have?" said he. "Jewels?" He snatched the morocco box from Miss Vivian's hands. "I must have something!" he cried. "I refuse to starve." And he ran off howling.

A van stood in the roadway, with horses trembling and snorting. "The law is dead," I said. "Every man takes what he wants now. Jump in."

My friend and his promised wife got under the tilt of the van, away from the fiery shower which was raining on us, and I mounted the box. The horses sprang away at a gallop. At the end of the road was a tangled block. The furniture of two houses had been pitched out helter-skelter, and lay there in wild confusion. A hansom had tried to cross it, and the horse had broken a leg, and lay deserted, and moving feebly. But it was no time for hesitation. I charged my team at the barrier, and with a crash and a bang and a rattle we were over.

We crossed the Knightsbridge Road, and entered Kensington Gardens by the Queen's Gate. A water main had burst in the middle of the roadway, and thrust up an ice-fountain twenty feet in height. I headed across for the Marble Arch, intending to get to one of the railway

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stations, where we could run away north out of this horrible city of fire and terror.

But before we were half-way across the parks the scent of fire came to us anew, and the horses began to snort with fresh terror. Bayswater was blazing, Paddington was on fire, and soon the fingers of the flames would be seizing Oxford Street in their awful grip. There seemed no chance of a respite. The gale raged more furiously than ever. I turned and made for Hyde Park Corner, and as we drove I saw no fewer than ten huge trees crash down before the straining of the wind.

But past Hyde Park Corner I could get the van no farther. The roadways were piled up to the doors of the houses on either side with a mass of vehicles, and alive with madly plunging horses. Never was known such a scene since the world began. And there they were doomed to wait, in that inextricable tangle, till the flames swept up and ground them into smoke.

We deserted our van, and hand-in-hand we skirted that awful block. We rounded Buckingham Palace Gardens, and got down to Victoria Street; but that was impassable, and we were forced to make our way through unconsidered by-paths where the crowds were less densely wedged.

Only once was our slow struggle onward interrupted. Of a sudden the air was split by a terrific roar; another followed; and another.

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The pavement beneath us shook, and the tall houses on either side shed dust. The gale for a moment stopped; then hit us with a fresh blast which there was no standing against; and then a tornado of dust and fragments swept down so thick that we could barely catch a breath. They were blowing up a line of houses along the fore-front of the fire, in the desperate hope that the flames would not leap the gap.

The crowd realised what had happened, and began to surge onward again. We fought our way along in its eddies. The exertion was something fearful, and for long enough I struggled on like a man in a dream, with one hand dragging at Miss Vivian, and the other wrestling with the people who thronged us. By a sort of dull instinct I was heading for the eastward. Hours must have passed — though they seemed like years — and when my weariness had grown so great that it seemed I could not drag myself a yard farther, I became dimly conscious that we were in Northumberland Avenue.

By a sort of natural impulse, and without a word being said, we turned into the Metropole. The hall of the hotel was filled with a rabble which would have done credit to the Ratcliffe Highway, and I dully wondered what they were doing there. But then I caught a glimpse of my own self in a mirror. My clothes were burnt full of holes; with the smoke and the falling soot I was black as a man who had worked a week

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in coal; I looked a greater outcast than any of them.

It seemed useless to ask for a room; in fact, there were no officials visible; each bedroom was overflowing, and in the corridors the grimy tenants made a human carpet. At length, up in the attics (where fewer of the crowd had dared to go through dread of the fire) we found a tiny room with only half a dozen occupants. Miss Vivian shared the bed with two other women, and Gerard and I threw ourselves on the floor and huddled against the others for warmth.

Sour-mouthed from want of sleep, I woke to the tune of splintering glass. Once more the fire was upon us. The gap of blown-up houses had done nothing to check its march. We roused the sleepers, and rushed to the stairways. Gleaming ice lay everywhere in the track of the bursted water-pipes. The wind shook the great building as we ran towards the entrance, and the roar of the advancing fire re-echoed in the passages. A torrent of humanity was pouring out into Northumberland Avenue.

But I had no wish that we should be driven farther eastward in that frightened sheep-pack before the wolves of flame. Retreat to the north was barred; we must get to the Surrey side; we must run somehow from this horrible city, where each in his blind terror was trampling down his neighbour.

We thrust our way through the crowds into

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Charing Cross Station, but the press was so great that the lines were blocked with writhing humanity, and no train could get in across the bridge. Then a thought occurred to me: The river was frozen, and we could make passage across the ice. We struggled back again, getting to the Embankment by Villiers Street, and feeling the breath of the advancing flames hot upon our faces. We went down the steps by Cleopatra's Needle, and got on the frozen surface without so much as a shoe wet. Under that intense frost even the tide of the Thames could not keep a patch of open water.

There were thousands of other people with us on the ice, and with them we made our way across to the southern bank. The buildings there had escaped the conflagration, and stood out in cold black silhouette against the windy sky. Men were standing on the white roofs to keep any flying embers from finding a lodgment. But of the other side, which we had left, who could put in mere words the grandeur and awfulness of the sight which it presented then? It seemed as though the great city had been first gripped by a polar winter, and was now being snatched back again by the powers of hell. And against that raid, human resistance was a puny derision.

Chelsea yielded now only a thin smoke; the Houses of Parliament and Westminster were skeletons outlined in flame. The Clock Tower

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was a great torch, lighting heaven. Whitehall was a furnace, where yellows and reds struggled for the mastery, and no trace of building could be seen. The great hotels of Northumberland Avenue, and the National Gallery beyond, were oozing reek and fire. And the drift of burning fragments drove over the icy roofs in front of the fire, and lit two score new streets every hour.

We watched on as the blaze drove eastwards, and saw it bite the end of the Strand, and then from the great shelter of Charing Cross Station there came a stream of shrieks which made us shudder. That, too, had been ravished by the flames, and of the thousands within it, all who could not escape were being baked alive, or crushed by the falling roof.

But meanwhile the freezing gale sweeping down the reaches of the river was nipping us with a more real kind of chill, and I saw that Miss Vivian was almost fainting with the exposure. Gerard said we must try and find some shelter, so we got ashore through a merchant's yard, and made our way to the Waterloo Road. This, too, was crammed with fugitives, but the terrifying scent of the fire was farther away, and the retreat was more orderly. We found a cab, and had nearly chartered it when two other men came up and bid against us. But we had the more gold, and the ride was ours. We were driven away to Dulwich, where Gerard had friends.

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And that is the last I saw of the actual burning of London. We were bruised, all three of us, from face to foot; we were badly scorched in many places; we were bone-weary; and once a hospitable door closed behind us, our limbs stiffened, and we were incapable of further struggle. For five awful days the fire strode on and gutted the whole of the City and almost all North London; and the glare of it was seen on the Cheviot Hills.

It turned into crumbling ruins the Bank of England and the Tower; it blasted out of existence the slums which lie between Wapping High Street and the Mile End Road. It burnt the shipping and the warehouses, the shops, and the offices, the private dwellings, and the wooden pavement of the streets; and by one means and another it had caused the death of five hundred thousand of the population.

Yes; half a million human beings perished in that awful tornado of flame, or died of the subsequent exposure and want; three thousand thousand were changed from householders into homeless outcasts; but figures will give no idea of the vast amount of property that was blotted out of existence. Not only was solid, visible wealth wafted away in smoke, but that mysterious asset, paper money, shrank from milliards into nothingness. The national credit was blasted, and the bourses of the outside world were smitten to their foundations. Civilisation

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has received no such shock since old Atlantis sank beneath the ocean waves.

* * * * *

And now we are face to face with the result. The awe-struck outer world has recovered its self-possession; we are still paralysed. The starving hordes of London have spread over the whole face of the fair land, and our towns bristle with riot. The other nations, forgetting their momentary pity, remember only their old hate. Shameful treaties are thrust upon us. Our colonies are being invaded. Trade has been reft from us. We are a nation with a glorious history, but no future.

New Chicago arose like a phœnix from the ashes of the old. But our London was no flimsy place of wooden joists and weather-boarding. It was a monument of centuries, and the nation is too heart-sick to begin again to build it on the old scale. The Government sits at Manchester, and the world mocks at it.

In the hour of our pride we boasted that no nation on earth could lay us low. But the elements were set to war against our might, and they have humbled the British Empire even unto the ground.

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XV

THE KID

I

THE birth of the Kid into our world took place when she had already run through eight years of existence elsewhere. The method of her arrival was curious, being free from the usual formalities. The date was coincident with young Fairbairn's twenty-first birthday.

At that period young Fairbairn was, during term-time, gracing Cambridge with his presence, and occupied the official position of cox in the Hall second boat. He was rather a bumptious youth, and to make memorable the day on which he could legally commence to ruin himself financially without let or hindrance, he decided on a small, but very select, stag dinner party. The time being Long Vac., and his own bachelor *ménage* sketchy, the feed took place at the Midland Hotel down at home, where they do things very well if you only know how to give an order. But this is long ago.

Trains from Ilkley being awkward, Carnegie and I happened to land in half an hour before we

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were due, and as no one was about, we strolled to the smoke-room bar and chatted over sherry and bitters.

From this occupation we were summoned by a waiter, who informed us that young Fairbairn was in a private sitting-room and desired audience of us. The waiter's manner was constrained, and we judged that he had been having things said to him, because he found occasion to remark quite irrelevantly that young Fairbairn was a "most remarkable fancy gentleman."

We found him fuming and profane. He spoke of taking legal proceedings against a large railway company, which is always an insane thing to do, even for a grown man. He held that the railway company kept a hotel, and under the Publicans Act were bound to supply shelter and victual to any one soever from whom due payment was forthcoming. At that period of his career, young Fairbairn looked forward to taking up the Law Special after he had passed his General, and consequently spoke upon matters legal with all the confidence of a vast and sweeping ignorance.

". . . And so I had the manager up," said he, at the end of the indictment, "and told him straight what I thought, and that, confound it, if she couldn't go into the restaurant, I'd have another private room and feed her there. 'By gum,' I said to him, 'what's the use of a man's coming of age unless he can do as he likes?'

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And now, what do you men think of her? There she is."

He waved his hand towards a small girl who sat in the farther angle of the room, and we grouped ourselves round the fireplace, and lit cigarettes and examined her.

Her age we were vague about then, but afterwards it was estimated at eight years. She wore one visible garment, like a potato sack with the largest hole down the hill; and because she sat well back in the chair, her feet and shins projected out of it like pink sledge runners. Her features were coyly veiled by an ample grime of dirt, and her hair was ratty and tangled, but we could guess at it as dark brown. Her eyes were dark brown also; there was no doubt about them; they were large, dog-like eyes with scare in them and some pitifulness. I believe it was those eyes which caught young Fairbairn's notice in the first instance.

The man of the evening waved his hand again. "I've bought that Kid," said he.

His manner was comically solemn, and our grin was a little constrained. Carnegie asked if his purchase was a freak, or if there was a solid reason for it.

"There was reason, sir — lumps of it. I was slumming down Swinegate this afternoon, because there are china shops there and I'd got some money I wanted to spend. That Kid begged of me, and I told her to get out of my way and go

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to the devil. Afterwards, when I was flattening my nose against a shop window, I saw a man hitting her over the head with his shut fist. Now perhaps you chaps will think I was a fool, but I suddenly hankered to lick that man. The only drawback was that I obviously couldn't. He was mostly size and brawn — a navvy when he chose to work, I guess — and I'm — well, you see I was coxing our Two last Mays, and I had to train down. Diplomacy was the only ticket, so I offered him sixpence to dry up.

"He took it like a missionary box, and the Kid stood on one side and rubbed her head. She didn't howl, didn't even snivel; which was plucky. She only, as I said, rubbed the places where she was bumped.

"The man fobbed the sixpence, laughed, and looked like going. Then he changed his mind and asked why I'd tipped him. I told him candidly enough that I did it as an alternative to thrashing him. I did want very much to hurt that man. If I'd had a pistol, I should probably have shot him — in the leg, say. You know, you men, I never could bear to see dogs and cats and animals smashed about, and I suppose it must be the same when one looks on at a kid getting battered. But I didn't know that before.

"'Look here, guv'nor,' says the man, 'what's that 'ere Kid to you? Just you tell me that?' He didn't mean to be truculent. He was apparently asking a question out of mild

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curiosity. I replied by sketching out the dog theory.

"'And supposin', guv'nor,' says the chap, 'as you saw a bloke a-haggling off the 'ind-leg of a dawg with a meat-saw just for a bit of sport, what 'ud you do?'

"'Kill him,' said I, promptly, 'if I could.'

"'You dam' little spitfire,' says the man. 'And supposin' 'e wasn't a shrimp like some folks is, and 'e said 'e'd see you blowed, and went on with 'is bit o' sport, what'd you do then?'

"'Buy the dog.'

"'Buy the dawg! Phew! That's yer little game, is it? Well, I wonder if you'd like to spend your money on other live stock. That 'ere gal 'as to be corrected for the good of her manners. When she don't arn me coppers, she arns a whackin' for herself. And if she stays on being my gal, I'm going to treat her to another whackin' just about now. But I'm open to a bid.'

"'What's your price?'

"''Arf a crown.'

"'There's your money.'

"'And a gallon of beer.'

"'Well, you brute, I'll give you that as well, and I hope you'll get drunk and hit a bobby and get run in. But that's all you'll squeeze out of me, and if you won't part with the Kid for that, you and she can go to the devil your own way.'

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"'Guv'nor,' said the man, 'and over. The Kid's yours, bones and soul; and much good may she do you.'

"And so," young Fairbairn concluded, defiantly, "I picked up a stray hansom and brought her along here; and now I'm wondering what on earth I'm going to do with her."

The child on the chair was picking chocolate almonds out of a large white satin-covered box, peering at us intently with those large dog's eyes as she ate. She reminded one of some wild animal feeding for the first time in captivity.

The three other men of the party had joined us by this, and one of them delivered himself of an opinion.

"A stray dog," said this Solon, "you can shoot, or give away if you know of any one Juggins enough to take him; a mongrel kid's different. No one would have an apparition like that for a present, and there's a prejudice against the shooting remedy as applied to this sort. Tell you what it is, old man: there's nothing for it, now you have got her, except adopting the Kid yourself. She's too old for daughter, but you might call her your aunt. Men do have juvenile aunts."

This was intended for humour. The idea of any undergraduate adopting any child was so outrageous that we howled at the funniness of it. The day before, young Fairbairn would have laughed too; but now his infancy had

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passed from him, and full of a new and grotesque dignity, he chose to resent our scoffings.

"I say, you men," he drawled out, "you're rather brutes, you know. Besides, the Kid's probably listening. I believe they understand. And, by the way, don't call me Youngun."

We sobered down a little, and Carnegie remarked that it was dinner-time, and that we'd better pack her off to the workhouse.

"Workhouse?" said Fairbairn, thoughtfully. "The workhouse is a rather awful sort of hole, isn't it? What 'ud they do with the Kid there?"

"Wash it, dress it, feed it, and teach it," said Carnegie. "At the age of about thirteen it would matriculate into usefulness, probably as general slavey to a small tradesman."

"Doesn't sound very choice," said young Fairbairn, thoughtfully.

"Standards differ," remarked Carnegie, dryly. "If that Kid were turned into the humblest of slaveys, it would be promotion from her present point of view."

Here a waiter came in, announcing that dinner was ready. Young Fairbairn wanted to stay and discuss the matter further; but we pointed out to him that it was a rudeness to his guests which we couldn't allow him to commit on any terms, and so we trooped off, leaving instructions that the Kid should also dine, in the seclusion of the sitting-room hired for her.

The dinner was distinctly gorgeous, and the

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blue-and-gold menus had crests on them, enamelled in three colours. We were given seven different kinds of wine and four liqueurs during dinner, and four wines after, and eighty-year-old cognac with the coffee. Barbaric splendour of this variety, particularly when taken internally, induces generosity which one sometimes repents of afterwards.

Young Fairbairn held that the Parcæ had picked that Kid from the gutter to become a power in the land, and we all quite agreed with him. It was suggested that one of the barmaids should take her in charge to inculcate personal cleanliness and the use of shoes without further delay; but because you cannot tip a bar-maiden, we fell back on the services of a chambermaid for this purpose. Having taken that first step, we set about plotting schemes of education and upbringing for the Kid, each man speaking confidently from the depths of his own profound inexperience. Finally, not being able to agree, we got affectionate, and left details entirely in the hands of young Fairbairn. As a preliminary we handed round the hat, making up in I.O.U.'s and currency a matter of fifty pounds. This would not cover the entire expenses of even the cheapest of the schemes propounded, but there was a sort of dim understanding that young Fairbairn would provide the balance out of his own privy purse. After this I fancy we went to bed.



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II

From the undergraduate standpoint there was nothing disgraceful in the trifle which, early in the next October, cut short young Fairbairn's career of usefulness at Cambridge. Anglicised, it may pithily be spoken of as "rioting with a view to the destruction of public monuments" (to wit, lamp-posts). But the deed in itself did not prove his additional fitness to remain as guardian to the Kid. And for that matter the ramifications of his subsequent insanities before the public eye here in England were even less assuring. He piled up a reputation for wildness which was little short of majestic in its weight, and he ran through a fourth-rate fortune as though it were merely pocket money.

Yet no one took away from him his guardianship. Perhaps no one wanted to. The only other persons in the world who could feel the least interest in the Kid's welfare were we five others who had sat at meat with him on that day of the Kid's new birth; and none of us moved. Perhaps we could not summon up sufficient interest; perhaps we feared to be let in for further expense.

Still, it must be owned that, though the Youngun did finger his own affairs with the unwisdom of the wild ass, he showed sanity when ordering the welfare of his *protégée*. A year at school made that young woman into

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another person. She had still a howling accent, but she didn't swear, and she was dropping unconventional idioms. In two years the accent had modified still further, and she was distinctly fit for civilised society. She had wonderful receptive powers. With a nice discrimination she imitated the better methods of speech and life which she saw in her new surroundings. Young Fairbairn's only lucid intervals in his career of descent were during the school's holidays. Then he took holidays too, and quiet lodgings, and in these rigidly adhered to the Kid's society. She soon lost her scared awe of him, and called him Youngun as easily as any of us could have done it.

In ways the Kid was a very old sort of child, and to hear her read young Fairbairn lectures, and rate him generally about his misdeeds, was a moral and improving recreation. I was dining with them one day just before things came to an end. She sat at the head of the table as though she had been born in the purple. We discussed with relish the ways of riding-masters till the *entrées* came, and then she broached the topic of finance.

She turned to me and demanded what I thought was the Youngun's latest craze.

I said I didn't know.

"Why," said she, "he's actually wanting to pack me off to a school which will cost at the very least two hundred a year, and he's as hard

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up as ever he can stick. I don't intend to go; they can teach me as much as ever I want where I am. 'Tisn't as if I wanted to start governessing afterwards."

"The Kiddie's present notion," said young Fairbairn, "is to turn shop assistant in a year or so's time. Humorous idea, isn't it?"

"Shop assistant," explained the Kid, gravely, "as a step to something else. I haven't quite decided yet, but I think it will be in a photographer's place. I'm not old enough yet, and I shall sponge on the Youngun for another two years; that will bring me up to sixteen, and then I'll begin. Do you know, Mr. M'Gilby, I shouldn't be surprised if I made a big fortune."

Young Fairbairn roared, but the Kid took his mockery with easy coolness. The day afterwards, I ran across to the West Indies.

I saw the Kid next some six months after this, and she commented on young Fairbairn's having received a snug Colonial appointment. Personally, I was under the impression that the individual in question had come a most tremendous mucker, and had cleared out of the country with suddenness lest worse befell; but I didn't correct her view, and when I learnt that two quarters' school fees had been paid since the exodus, I wondered much where the money had come from.

The Kid's education and other expenses footed up, at that period, to quite £180 per annum.

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Young Fairbairn had to live himself, somewhere, somehow, and until he left these shores he had never done an hour's work in his life. Moreover, he was eminently unfitted, by both education and habits, for the acquisition of wealth. He had shown great ability to spend it, and converses are seldom true.

When I saw that those school fees continued to be paid, these matters furnished me with food for reflection.

III

There was certainly something about the Kid's methods which one could not help admiring. True to her previous announcement, at the age of sixteen she took herself away from school and got a job in a big photographer's shop. She had to begin at the bottom — pencilling in ladies' eyebrows, I suppose, and tinkering up their back hair, and helping them to their cloaks when they had finished a sitting. Then she worked in the office; then as a retoucher, which brought her up to the age of nineteen. At this period Carnegie met her again, and was more impressed than he afterwards liked.

I had the story from his own lips.

"I was never so struck in my life," he said. "I went into the shop to get some cabinets done, and who should I see but the Kid, pretty as a picture and managing half the business. She was full of work, and couldn't talk with me then,

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but they closed at six, and I walked home with her. Do you know, she's actually putting away money? — earns it, too. That sweep, young Fairbairn, has dropped his remittances — I never made out how he kept them going as long as he did — and she's been living entirely on her own ever since she left school."

And he said more things; but I saw there was something still further, and I pressed Carnegie and heard it.

"You're right, M'G.," he said, with a sort of groan; "I did see more of her. In fact, I stayed on in town just because I wanted to meet her every day. It's rather ludicrous, isn't it, for a man of my position to care for a girl who'd developed from that Kid? She told me so, too — I give her all credit for that. She didn't draw me on an inch, and I'm sure she was honestly sorry when I disregarded several blunt warnings and proposed to her. But she wouldn't hear of it — said she didn't care for me in that way, and wasn't going to marry me for money; said she'd been beholden enough to us men already, and was going to play the rest of the game through with her own hand. She's going to start up a place on her own hook directly, but she wouldn't even let me advance a pound or two to help her float that. She says she'll get the necessary credit in the proper quarter, and fight it through on her own business merits. I tell you, Mac, old man, she has pluck, that Kiddie of — I wish I could

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even say, of ours. But she isn't ours any longer. She isn't even young Fairbairn's, because he's gone under. She's just her own, and I believe, as she says, she'll see it through alone."

IV

The Kid did start that photographic business on her brazen own, and it prospered, and grew, and overflowed into sections and sub-sections, with four studios in London and six in big provincial towns. For Art with a big A the Kid cared not one little hang; but she knew what the public wanted, which is to be made to look pretty on a card for a reasonable price; and she did this for them, and that's why she caught on. The mounts of her photographs were punched with a mere surname and initials, and people took it for granted that they belonged to a man. The Kid never went out anywhere, knew no one except strictly business people, and was known by none. She made her one and only object in life the amassing of money; and because she stuck to this aim and never departed from it, she became the possessor of stocks and shares and majestic bank accounts which would have made London stare if London had known about them. At the commencement of proceedings she had fixed a pecuniary goal-post to make for; to wit, £250,000. She didn't merely hope for it; she made up her mind decidedly that she would get it; which is the way with successful people.

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When the Kid had reached her mark — which she did at the absurdly early age of seven and twenty — she did a very peculiar thing. She chucked up the business entirely. It was put to her very plainly that, if she would still remain the nominal head, a limited liability company could be floated on most advantageous terms. But she wouldn't do this; she wanted to cut it altogether; and consequently she sold it at a painfully small price. And now that same business is going down hill every day, because the present owners don't run it with the *nous* which our Kid brought to bear.

I was in town and called upon the Kid just after she had completed the sale. She spoke of a great many things, and finally wound up by stating that a fortune had been left out of remorse to young Fairbairn by some one who had swindled him on the turf.

On the strength of one or two vague hints gathered from what had gone before, I spoke up.

"My dear Kiddie," I said, "you always used to be a truthful person."

"And still remain so."

"As a general thing, perhaps. But not about this legacy of the Penitent Thief. He's blatantly apocryphal."

"He shall exist, Mac, if I choose it to be so. He is anonymous and repentant and dead. Also the money will be placed to the Youngun's ac-

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count, and if he doesn't use it, the whole lot will lie idle doing nothing."

"Kiddie, I'm beginning to believe, with Carnegie, that you are about the best girl in the world."

"Blarney, Mac. I tell you again that the Penitent Thief bequeathed the money."

"And I repeat that I don't believe a word of it. You're showing gratitude of a sort which I thought was only made up by the novelist folk."

"Gratitude! Rubbish."

I leaned my head over her and spoke very quietly.

"Then if it isn't gratitude, Kiddie, it's — it's the other thing."

Then, for perhaps the first time in her life, our Kid lost her coolness. She started, flushed, dropped her head against my shoulder. "Oh, Mac, old friend," she said, "if you only knew how I've felt about the Youngun all these years! It isn't common sordid gratitude alone. It is — the other thing as well. I was that way from the very beginning when I sat eating those chocolate almonds out of that white satin box, and you men stood back to the fire and talked over my destiny. You thought I didn't understand. I did: I took in every word, and I remember who said what. Carnegie suggested the workhouse. You —— But never mind that now, Mac: you always were a good sort. But it was the Youngun who was the best of you all. He

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might be a rackety fool; he might be this, that, and the other; all you say and more. Still, it was he who pulled me out of the gutter, and he who brought me up. You don't know, you can never know, what the Youngun did for me, Mac; and he thought I didn't know, didn't see half the sacrifices he made. I'm not emotional, old friend, and I never said much then, and that's perhaps why I felt all the more deeply. I've never spoken about it to a living soul yet; but you were here and — and — I had to tell. Somehow I couldn't keep it to myself any longer. Mac, do you know how the Youngun got money to keep me those last two years at school? He laboured with his hands, and he pawned his labour for years to come — yes, Mac, sold himself into slavery, and wrote me cheery lies that he had an easy Colonial appointment. And that was a man who was under no human pledge to me whatever — a man who had bought me in the street, bones and soul, for half a crown and a gallon of beer."

"I didn't know all this. Who would have guessed that young blackguard to be half such a good fellow? Kiddie dear, if I were in your shoes, I should love the ruffian myself."

The Kid gave my arm a squeeze, and went on: —

"Find him for me, Mac — find him, and bring him back to England and to what's his. I can't get trace of him myself, though I sent a man out

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to the Cape two years back, and kept him there till he had looked in the face of every Englishman in Southern Africa; and yet I know that he is alive somewhere — I am sure of it. I can't tell you why, but I am sure."

"Right you are, Kiddie: the Youngun is alive, or was a month back."

She turned upon me almost fiercely.

"Mac! Mac! I haven't deserved this! Why didn't you tell me?"

"Because, my dear Kid, I didn't know whether it was good that you should be enlightened. The Youngun, as he at present stands, is not a desirable object to bring back to England and poverty. Your man didn't find him at the Cape, because he wasn't there. He went on to Florida, orange-growing. A full-strength regiment of other men have gone there for the same game, and if all the orange trees were equally divided up, there might be one per man. As it is, the Youngun hasn't got his, and he resides in a palmetto-shack near Naples, and subsists on mullet and sweet potatoes."

"Mac, is he — alone?"

I laughed, and stooped down and kissed her on the hair.

"All right, Kiddie, he's not married; and, as you're fool enough to want him, you shall have the beast. I'll go and clothe him, tell him about the Penitent Thief, and bring him over."

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V

Now, I'd made up my mind that this was going to be one of those ideal things one reads about — a match that was a love-match on both sides; but after six months had gone by, I began to have strong doubts as to whether it would turn out into a match at all. Young Fairbairn swallowed the Penitent Thief yarn, lock, stock, and barrel, and bought a frock coat and fine linen. He was probably the happiest man in London, and he assumed an air of easy patronage with the Kid, for which I lusted to kick him. He hadn't aged one bit in his years of vagabondage, because, amongst his few virtues, he did not drink, and was not addicted to head-work. He looked very smart and debonair, but when I saw him taking the Kid about, and playing the *rôle* of benevolent uncle, I felt more than riled. She, poor girl, looked wretched; yet what could a man do? A third person who interferes in these matters is usually, in the future, cut dead by both parties.

But at last I could stand it no longer. Young Fairbairn with his absurdly patronising airs made me burst rabidly into speech.

"D' you know, Mac," he said one day at the club, "that when I first came back here I very nearly got mashed on that Kid of ours. Thought of marrying her, I mean. Fact: I really did.

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By the way, haven't you ever thought it's queer she never did pick up a husband? She's jolly good-looking; she's rich; and I swear no one would ever spot she isn't a lady. But," he concluded reflectively, "I believe she's one of those curious women who don't care twopence for any men."

It was then that I rose in my wrath, and shamefully abused part of a woman's confidence, and rent young Fairbairn into startled fragments. I spoke of the Penitent Thief. He had puzzled over that individual a little, but not much: didn't see that his identity mattered so long as the money was there. But when I drew his more special attention to the story, he saw that that deceased robber was an utterly impossible and apocryphal personage, and another light began to dawn upon him.

"My word, M'G., is this really true? Didn't this fellow ever exist? And is it the Kid who has really pensioned me?"

"Use the small wit the fates have given you," I snarled back.

"I deserve to be kicked."

"If ever a man did, you're he. But I thought you were in love with the girl all along, or you should have stayed in your palmetto-shack. What did you bring her up for? Why did you do hard labour in the Cape to pay those school fees?"

"Because that was the only one dogged thing

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I had in my nature. I swore to myself I'd rear up that Kid decently; and at other times I swore other things; but that was the only one I ever at all stuck to. But I didn't do it because I loved her — not then, that is. I — er — I suppose I do love her now. Since I've come back, that is, and she's grown up. Yes, old man, of course I am honestly and really in love with her now."

I considered he was lying, but didn't say so: preserved instead the silence of the damned.

"You needn't glare at me in that way, Mac. In fact, confound me, I should like to know what the devil you mean by it? You seem in an infernal sulky temper this morning. I'll leave you. I'm going to look up the Kid."

"If you've anything of the gentleman left in you, you'll propose to her," I snapped out.

"You mind your own blasted business," retorted young Fairbairn, and slammed the door behind him.

I paced up and down the room, and relieved my feelings by addressing profanity to the chandelier. This employment soothes one under some circumstances.

Young Fairbairn did not turn up to a dinner appointment that night, much to the annoyance of a certain hostess with daughters; but I saw him next day at a private view, and the Kid was hanging close on his elbow. She was beaming. She was looking so absurdly happy that people stared a little and then smiled.

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The rooms were crammed, and it was some time before we came together. But she caught my eye early on, and telegraphed to me a long bulletin in two œillades and a lift of the eyebrows. You see, I have come to understand the Kid's methods rather well. It is the way with a woman you are fond of. But at last the crowd surged, and I got across.

"Mac," she said, when I shook hands with her, "what have you been doing to the Youngun? He says he won't have you for his best man, and I can't get out of him why. Now sit down here with me and tell the reason at once."

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XVI

THE RENEGADE

I

"Dze trade's nod what it was," said Schwartz, "we are getting shut in. It is those teufel English dot's shutting us."

"Don't abuse the English," said Moriarty; "they play fair, and we've got to take our chances. There's a bit too much of the sordid money grubber about you, mein Herr partner, for my taste. Now I'm this way: if I can't be with the hounds, I don't mind playing fox. I must be in the hunt somewhere. It's no use asking me to be a plain humdrum shopkeeper. I couldn't do it."

"No one asks you. You are slave dealer now, and dot's somewhere very different." Schwartz poured fresh tobacco into the china bowl of his pipe from a gourd, and a watchful negro girl brought her master a light from the cooking fire outside the hut. "You have had your fun getting dis grew together — more fun than I liked — und now what I say is, let us shkip for dze Goast, und find dhows, und get dze niggers sold

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in South Arabian ports, where dere's always a strong market."

"We've only eighty head of the beggars so far," said the Irishman, "and counting — er — casualties, it's doubtful if we can bring more than sixty of those to our friends the purchasers, even if we have the luck to dodge the cruisers and not lose any of the dhows. Now I say it's not enough. I'm in this business for the sport of the thing, as I've told you many a time already, but I'm in it for profit as well. And this *coup* isn't big enough for my taste, anywhere near."

"Ach, you want to get rich quick, und go back to Inkland, und be respectable once mores."

Moriarty laughed rather savagely. "Mr. Schwartz," he said, "if you were a gentleman, I'd hit you. You got the story of my mess out of me drunk, and I don't mind repeating it to you sober. A man who has been in the Service, and who got caught as I was, swindling — you see I don't mince the word — swindling at loo, clears out of England as fast as he can run, and he doesn't go back. If he did, the regiment would just eat him. But as I say, he doesn't go back, having some shreds of decency left. Still, the incident is one he naturally isn't proud of, and although if some bounder (who doesn't know better) drags it up a second time, and he doesn't smash that bounder's face without further warning, there is a distinct limit to his patience, and if the subject

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isn't dropped, he is bound to hit sooner or later. You quite see this officer's way of looking at it?"

"You talk outside me," said Schwartz, "but if I have said something you do not like, I am sorry. I do not play your English card game, loo. I play only sciart. Und for what do you want moneys if you wish not to leave dis Africa, und go somewheres else to be respectable?"

"Well, old man, the jaunt I have in my mind's eye at present is a bit of a tea-party in Zanzibar. I've been there once before, and beheld the place, and saw its opportunities; but I'd no money, and had to clear. Oh, you didn't know me there. It was before I'd come low enough — I mean before I'd the felicity to become your partner over this slave-trading racket. However, you shall just see me in Zanzibar the next time, if I've got the funds. I'll paint that town the lightest tint of post-office red; I'll give the girls the most gorgeous kind of treat; and when I've got steam thoroughly up, I'll go and draw the British Consul. Finest sort of entertainment imaginable that, Schwartz, when you're at some hole-in-corner foreign town, to go and solemnly pull the leg of the British Consul. I go and tell him I'm a persecuted Irish informer, paid by the Government to skip the country, followed everywhere, and in hourly dread of assassination. If I've luck, I can always persuade him that half the respectable residents of his town are subsidised by the Fenians to put a knife between my shoulder blades."

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"Well, I am not dot kind of damfool myself. But I do not stand in the way of your desires. Let us trek, und so the sooner you can get to your red-painting" — Herr Schwartz waved a hand to indicate the village with the White Nile swilling along its flank. "The use of this place is to us ended. The Inklish will get Khartoum to-morrow of the next day; dere was nothing who can stop dem getting Khartoum; und then in one month dey valse in here und make demselves king in the present thief-king's place."

"Rule Britannia," said Moriarty. "I bet they have a fine picnic of it, and make His Wickedness the King here sit up. A little hanging would do him a power of good."

"We haf all dze slave he can find for sell," said Schwartz. "He got no further use, und your meddlesome Inklish can hang him first und eat him afterwards for all I care. Girl, bring me fire. If you do not watch to see when my pipe is dead, I will haf you whipped."

"Yes, we're a grateful couple, aren't we? I wonder what force they'll send up to do the job. If they only bring Gippy regiments without a battalion or so of Tommies to stiffen them up, they'll be likely to catch a cold."

"Zo?" said Schwartz. "Then you must think small of your Inklish soldiers, und your Egypt mercenaries. Mit one tousand of any continental troops I would kill all dose peoples who live here" — he jerked a contemptuous thumb

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towards the town — "und set dem to float down der Nile for crocodile-chop. Ja, und I would not lose ten men doing it."

"Oh, get out," said the professional soldier. "There are twelve thousand fighting men here and in the district, and they have all got guns of sorts, with swords and spears and mountains of pluck to fall back upon. I tell you that some officer will find soon that this town is a toughish nut to crack."

"And I tell you that you are wrong. Dere is not a night comes but what fifty, hundred, two hundred, sometimes tousand peoples creep away from here und get gobbled up by big country out beyond there. Dey don't like the king because he sells dem for slaves some, or cuts off deir hands and feet when he has headache; und dey don't like dze Inklish dot's coming, pecause dey think dze Inklish — how you say? — anthropophagous. You do not believe? Well, you have been away und you do not know. But I haf been here all dis time, und I can see mit mine eyes."

"Come to think of it, I have been away from here three months collecting that last batch of niggers, and as you've been on the spot all the time, I suppose you will be better up in local politics. Well, there'll be less scrimmage when our chaps do come, and fewer funerals, and slower promotion, that's all. Rhodes won't be long in getting his through cable from the Cape to Cairo, now."

It appeared that the grimy Schwartz had

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something more to say on this point, for he was obviously working up his slim knowledge of the English tongue into the framing of a suitable sentence; but some other thought seemed to occur to him before that sentence was fit for delivery, and he stifled it in its birth. So the larger topic dropped between them, and they fell to talking of their own more immediate interests. The red-headed Moriarty told the successes and failures of his recent raid; how he had caught a dozen stout slaves here; how at the next village every soul had got the alarm early, and escaped into the bush before he and his merry men came up; and how at another place, which he had surrounded with elaborate caution, and where he looked forward to a fat capture, he found confluent small-pox raging, and was temporarily deserted by his own men because he would not run away at the pace they chose for their hurried retreat. "By all the Saints," he finished up, "I've the makings of a rare buccaneer in me. I tell you I've regularly enjoyed myself sometimes. They were regular divils for a fight: both our own ruffians and the fellows we came across. I didn't envy you your barrack duty here, mein herr."

"Every man for his capacity," said the German. "I take what I am capable most of performing. I was book-keeper once in Berlin till dze books go wrong, und when I come — how do you say?"

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"When you get out of chokey you want to be back at book-keeping again, eh? You're a most business-like creature, Schwartz."

"Well," said Schwartz, "here is what I haf done," and he reeled out long catalogues of house-keeping, and slave-guarding, and bribes to the savage potentate who had given them camp-room. The account was redolent with figures and arid facts, and Moriarty lay back in his chair and yawned and made but a limp show of attention. But the German mouthed his statement with gusto. As he said, every man has his own particular favourites amongst the affairs of life.

But a stop was put to this reporting. Messengers came from the King, bearing the usual present of introduction in the shape of a skinny sheep. What they had to say was weighty matter enough, and whilst they spoke the sheep bleated outside the door in the throes of execution. A force headed by Belgians, it seems, was coming up out of the Congo territory, and the King wanted the help of his two European guests and their trained fighting men to aid him in repelling the invasion.

The message was spelled out in laborious phrases and gestures by the interpreter, and Moriarty's eye lit as he listened. But Schwartz was stolidly contemptuous. "What for do you come again with this tale?" asked Schwartz, when they had finished their say. "Yesterday you ask me the same, und I say, dis your king's palaver; dis not

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our palaver; und — we shall not help his fight." He flung a hand towards the door of the hut — "Go," he said. "We are traders; we do not mix in dose matters."

The interpreter turned and explained, but the envoys did not at once depart. They looked meaningly at Moriarty, as though they expected him to join in the answer.

Moriarty whistled thoughtfully. "It would be a mess," he said, after a pause, "if these blessed Belgians did come and smash up the army of His Wickedness, and collar the town."

"What would it matter to you?" grunted Schwartz.

"Well, if they were here, and in possession, our fellows could not very well take it."

"Zo. But still I do not see how you would be hurt."

"Hang it all, man, supposing there was a German army working up the river, and they'd got Egypt, and they'd got the Lakes, and the Cape, and all the country down there, and they were just wanting this bit of ground here for their through telegraph wire, what would you do?"

"Nothing. Chermany can betam. I am cosmopolite."

"Well, I'm not," said Moriarty. "By God, no! Civis Romanus sum (though I never shouted it out like that before), and if I can help the old shop to hoe her row, I'm on for doing it. I'm

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kicked out of course, but, by the Lord, I'd rather be a kicked-out Britisher than a full-blown citizen of — well — a continental country I could name."

"Chermany? Quite so. Chermany is a swine country, if you like. I do not mind. I am cosmopolite. But why should you interfere here? If you keep back dose Belgians till dze Inklish can come, do you think dey will thank you? Ach, no!"

"I should say they will shoot me if they can catch me within gunshot. The British Army doesn't recognise the unauthorised help of civilians, and I'm a civilian now; and moreover, you know, Mr. Schwartz, there's a prejudice against slave-traders, especially white slave-traders. No, my man, I've absolutely nothing definite to gain out of interfering — except the satisfaction of upsetting those beastly Belgians — but, at the same time, I'm going to do it."

"But I say no. Und we are partners. Und so I haf my say."

"Partners we may be in trade. But I'm the man that's bossed our soldiers, and there's small doubt as to whose orders they'll obey if you try to set up against me."

"You are breaking der deed of partnership," said the German, violently.

"Very well," said Moriarty, "when you get down to the nearest consulate, put your complaint in writing. It would make a fine head-

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ing for a newspaper article: 'The injured Slave-trader.'"

"You are dishonest to me."

"Who are either of us that we should set about measuring honour or honesty? Now look here, my man. You'd better give way civilly, and make the best of it. For good or evil I always have my way, and you know it, and I'm going to help His Wickedness here against these Belgians, and that's flat. But look now, we'll have an eye to business over the matter, too, if that'll suit you. I don't know that Congo niggers make any worse slaves than Somalis. They'll buy most anything with four black limbs to it in those South Arabian ports."

"Dot vas so. I hadn't thought of dose."

"Well, don't you talk any more about my breaking the partnership agreement. The thing turns out to be a sound, honest, business speculation (though, 'faith, neither of us seemed to have guessed it before), and I ought to draw an extra percentage of the profits for making you chip in. My aunt, but I will decorate Zanzibar if this comes off. And pull that British Consul's leg."

"You look too far ahead. Dere was bad risk, I tell you."

"Always is over a soft thing. But if this has got to be gone through with, I must get His Wickedness's local army together, and put it through its Autumn Manœuvres before any more

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time's lost." He turned to the waiting envoys, and the interpreter bowed expectantly. "Look here, Mr. Linguister, go and tell the king that we'll help defend his hearth and home, but that he must give me command of his rabble as well as my own. You don't quite savvy? Well, by Jove, I'll come with you and see the old rip now this minute. If we're going to pull this thing off, there's no time left to waste over diplomatic approaches."

There is, perhaps, nothing on earth more flattering to the white man, until use has made the compliment stale, than the black man's blind acknowledgment of his superiority in the arts of both war and peace. There seems something instinctive about this, just as there is for the young monkey to climb, or for the unfledged thrush to open its mouth for worms. And so when it became known that the red-headed white man Moriarty, assisted by the dirty white man in spectacles, was to superintend the fighting of the king's troops, the backs of those worthies stiffened forthwith, and the series of nightly desertions came to an end. The African may resent executions, and mutilations, and confiscations if these are carried on too long, though, truth to say, he is very long-suffering in the matter; but he is a perfect glutton for a fight if he is sure that he will be competently led, and on a well-arranged field of battle he will die as stubbornly and lightheartedly as any commander could desire.

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Now in the days before the Fall, when Moriarty served the Queen, his superior officers had many a time shaken their heads over him, and none of them had ever seen fit to predict that he would rise unreasonably high in his profession. But for this other kind of leadership he was exactly fitted. His early military education had given him a rude notion of strategy and the handling of troops, and his recent experiences had taught him nicely the limitations of the African. He knew to a nicety how much to lead, how much to taunt, how much to praise, how much to drive, and he never fell into the blunder of giving his under officers orders so complicated that the thickness of their heads would prevent those orders being carried out. He erected an iron discipline tempered with unexpected kindnesses, and he let his troops clearly understand that if they did not crumple up the Belgians, they would suffer very heavily under the vengeance of Mr. Moriarty. As an afterthought, he explained his wish to capture alive as many of the Belgians' black soldiers as might be, having need for them in the ranks of his slave-caravan.

Schwartz was his incubus. Schwartz openly quavered for his skin, and repeated daily that he had come up-country for trade and not for political meddling, and he refused to be comforted even by the promise of whole regiments — prospective regiments — of valuable black ivory.

Schwartz was a great nuisance, and his partner

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was often tempted to shoot him out of mischief's way. And on his part, Herr Schwartz was ponderously searching for an opportunity to shoot the meddlesome Mr. Moriarty, so that the inheritance already collected might be his, and he could leave the district ere worse befell. It was the nearness of those teufel English which got on Schwartz' nerves. He did not look upon them as adding sport to the situation. He looked upon them merely as the enemies to a very lucrative trade.

And so the situation in the army of defence was not without its straining elements.

II

Now in the English camp, by the White Nile-side, some fifty miles lower down the river, there was an Intelligence Department that was reported in native quarters to be in league with dijinns and afrits; and certainly many of its performances (when the propelling machinery was left unexplained) bordered on the marvellous. At the same time, because something must always be allowed for the imagination of the African, its utterances were not always to be relied on as being exclusively composed of fact. This limitation was quite understood, and as a rule caused no special inconvenience.

The General in command of the camp however was on one occasion led, solely through the Intelligence Department, to give order for a white

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man's execution, when he might very reasonably have let the poor fellow continue to live had his information been a little more detailed and accurate. It was true that the white man was beyond the pale of society, and also that he was that odious thing, a collector and a trafficker in negro slaves; but he deliberately (in the course of his other employment) gave the Empire a helping lift onwards in her career, and on this account, if for no other, he deserved to be fired at with a crooked gun, and given a hint to hurry away and escape.

For various reasons it was a delicate affair, and one for which the order could not be given in anything like openness; but the General knew his officers, and after thought singled out a certain subaltern with ambition. It was not a matter over which an order could be given in writing; indeed, it was one of those things which the senior would repudiate if anything went wrong, and for which the subordinate would have to bear the blame; and this the General pointed out with easy frankness, and the subaltern heard with a thumping heart because he saw that here was indicated promotion.

They had gone out into the desert after the humble picnic known as mess, these two, and they walked under the violent moonshine where none could overhear them. Behind them was the hum and glow of the camp, and the bustle of men being embarked on a couple of stern-

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wheel steamers; and before them was the great sand waste, with its scattered furniture of bones and thorn bushes. Men say and think things quite as matter of fact in these regions of danger and discomfort that they would barely dare to dream about in civilised homely England. There is a balance in these affairs.

"Now," said the General, "those steamboats are going up river, crammed with as many men as they'll hold, and an hour before dawn they're to attack and take a town that's just fifty miles from here. All this you know, but I'm just recapitulating for the sake of clearness. Give me a match. Thanks. There'll be fighting, bad fighting; and if there were more steamers, I'd much like to send more men. But those two are all there are, and they're packed as tight as they'll hold, and so the fellows who'll go will have to fight all the harder, eh?"

"They won't mind," commented the subaltern, thinking he was expected to say something. "All the more promotion, sir."

"You'd like a step, eh?"

"I'm to be married, sir, when I get my company."

"Humph, well, I can perhaps put you in the way of it. But if you do get it, and don't contrive to be knocked on the head in the process, you'd perhaps better not tell the lady the details afterwards. It's a Service matter."

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"Quite understand, sir."

"Very well, then. Now look here: this is the situation. The reason I can't afford to wait whilst another steamer is pushed up river so that I could send a stronger force, is because that old King up there has got some white blackguard to drill his troops. The fellow, according to our intelligence, once wore the same coat you've got on now, more shame to him, and he's quite up to his work; and if we give him enough time to knock the niggers into shape, he'll get a force together in that town which will take a lot of licking. So you see that's why I'm pushing forward the attack at once. Follow?"

"Perfectly."

"Good. Then here's your work cut out for you. Never mind the general scuffle. Keep your eye on the white man, and bottle him. You needn't have any sentimental notions of pity; he's a most pernicious renegade, anyway; and he's far too capable and mischievous to be let run wild about Africa any longer. You quite grasp?"

"I think so. You want this Englishman brought ——"

"Confound you, no, I want him brought nowhere. To begin with, he isn't an Englishman at all, if they report rightly from Zanzibar. He's Irish and — well, I'm an Irishman too, me lad, and I know my countrymen. If you

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brought him into camp here I couldn't very well hang him, and he'd talk, and talk, and there'd be no knowing where he'd stop once he got his tongue well started. There was a blackguard I knew once, called Moriarty, who got broke for card-sharping — well, never mind that. But understand quite clearly that whatever happens, I don't want that man taken prisoner. Have you got it all now? My faith, there goes the bugle! Be off with you, or the boats will start whilst you are on the bank."

Presumably the General merely wished the interview to end, because after the subaltern raced off, he too followed at more leisurely pace, and after he had passed through the camp and come to the river's bank, the two steamers were still waiting (as though by order) to receive his final word. He proceeded to give this in those sharp, telling phrases which sound so finely at the time, though they always savour of melodrama afterwards, and then the steamers wheeled off into the black and silver of the night, and those who were left behind cheered, and began to reckon what coming casualties might bring them. There is always the chance on active service of waking up one morning famous — through receipt of an acting commission.

Now the period of waiting for a *coup* of this sort to develop itself one way or another is never a time of undiluted joy. The General in command was in especial eaten up with the unpleas-

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antest anxiety, and officers who came in contact with him said that his temper verged on the diabolic. He had done his best, but that does not count for much. There were bound to be so many chances which he could not foresee. If all went off rightly, well, he wrote his dispatches with a free hand, and a little later on would step into a knighthood, which, he told himself, he thoroughly deserved. But if the renegade white man up country had drilled the negroes into too formidable shape, and the English troops had to retire (which is the polite word for run away) a good deal cut up, well then he would have to take the consequences, and own up to the disaster in formal black and white. There are too many newspaper correspondents about nowadays for a commanding officer to gloss over defeat very delicately. He would be told that he had been rash if the defeat was small, criminally rash if the beating was a bad one, and an official black mark would be put against his name that would take a lot of rubbing out. But the event was now out of his hands, and the only thing left him was to pray for luck, which is an irritating species of supplication, as his fellow-officers found.

But two days after they had steamed away, one of the stern-wheelers came spluttering back and tied up against the bank, and began with care to disgorge half a dozen wounded. From the look of that, there had been nothing vitally

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wrong, and presently when the formal written report came to be read, the General's face began to brighten marvellously. "Let's see the butcher's bill," he muttered to himself; "three killed, eleven wounded; why, that's nothing. And they've got the place, lock, stock, and barrel." And then he turned back to the body of the report and lifted his eyebrows and said "Humph!" A little later he said to himself, "Well, it's been a near thing apparently, but it's come off. Somebody else pays, and I win. Whew! By Jove, but this is a streak of luck!"

Other officers had to be talked with first, and it was late that night before he could decently call away for another quiet stroll in the desert that subaltern whom he had trusted with a special service.

"Well," he said, when they got out of earshot of the lines, "are you going to marry your girl?"

"If you please, sir," said the subaltern.

"I'm almost sorry —— There, man, don't look shocked. You had your orders, and you've carried them out. Only, I've learned a thing or two since that I didn't know at the time, and it appears that we owe something to your renegade, though it's quite unlikely he intended to do it as a kindness."

"You mean his crumpling up that Belgian expedition the day before we came up? Well, he did that certainly, sir, and it would never have been done without him, and I suppose if they'd

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taken the place and we came up and found them sitting down in possession, it would have been awkward."

"Devilish awkward, to say the least of it."

"But as to the other matter, I only carried out your orders, sir."

"Quite so, quite so. I oughtn't to have said what I did just now, so don't get annoyed with me."

"Well, I didn't murder the ruffian, or anything like that, General. He wasn't in the fighting. He was sort of looking on outside one of the houses, and he didn't offer to raise a finger till I rushed him. He'd a revolver in his holster, and I got him to shoot first, and then I potted back. He was a rank bad shot — and I'm another; we both emptied our pistols; but I dropped him with the last cartridge. There was a German in spectacles in the hut behind him, looking very scared, but — er — you didn't say anything about a second white man, sir."

"Didn't know there was one."

"Well, as I'd got no instructions, and I concluded you wouldn't want a white prisoner, I just let him run. In fact, I hadn't got my pistol loaded, and he did run without consulting my convenience. Oh, and I don't know whether the Colonel told you in his report, but from some papers which were left about, your Irishman's name seems to have been Moriarty. A little red-haired chap, he was."

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"Good God!" muttered the General, "I wonder if it could be the same."

"Er — I beg your pardon, sir."

"Nothing," said the elder man; but he sighed, and looked out towards the purple horizon of the desert, and presently he murmured, "Poor devil, poor, poor devil."

The subaltern coughed discreetly. The General in command came to earth again. "Well," he said, "this unfortunately isn't quite a thing I can recommend you for the D.S.O. over, although I'm sure you deserve it. But I'll see you get your company all right. Go back to camp now and tell people if you like. I'm going to stay and walk about here a bit longer in the quiet. I've a lot to think out."

"Wonder if the old Chief knew this Moriarty person," the subaltern mused as he walked back towards the line of sentries. "Funny go if he did. Well, I've got a jolly letter to write home to the little girl, anyway."

He pulled a photograph out of the breast of his tunic, and kissed it with a couple of hearty smacks, and then went on his way to the camp, whistling.

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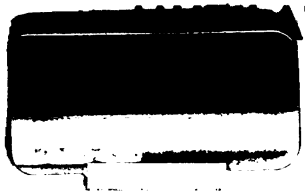
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